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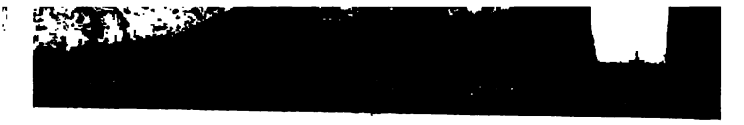
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Annals of The Horse-Shoe Club



Finch Mason











ANNALS OF THE HORSE-SHOE CLUB







[redacted]

'BELFLAVER WINS!'



FIVE ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE AUTHOR

LONDON
[illegible]
1902





ANNALS OF

[illegible] CLUB

BY

FINCH MASON

[illegible]

WITH FIVE ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE AUTHOR

LONDON

[illegible]

1902





ANNALS OF
HE HORSE-SHOE CLUB

BY

FINCH MASON

AUTHOR OF 'THE TAME FOX,' 'MAD LORRIMER,' ETC.



WITH FIVE ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE AUTHOR

LONDON
CHATTO & WINDUS
1902





TO

GEORGE P. B. FORES, ESQ.,

WHO WAS THE FIRST TO ENCOURAGE HIM IN DELINEATING
SPORTING SUBJECTS WITH PEN AS WELL AS PENCIL,
THIS VOLUME IS DEDICATED, WITH A FEELING
OF GRATITUDE HE POSSIBLY DOES NOT
GIVE HIM CREDIT FOR, BY HIS
OLD FRIEND,

THE AUTHOR.







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ANNALS OF
THE HORSE-SHOE CLUB

INTRODUCTION

I AM by nature fond of variety in any shape or form. It is my nature to, as Dr. Watts says. Therefore the reader will not be astonished to hear that in my favourite pursuit of fox-hunting the term 'ubiquitous' might (as it undoubtedly is) well be applied to me.

I make it, indeed, a practice, year after year, to betake myself and my horses to different quarters for the hunting season. For instance, one year I am to be found disporting myself with the Cheshire; the next, as likely as not, with the Cottesmore. Anon, I give Yorkshire a benefit, and am to be seen with the Bedale and the Bramham Moor. The following season, in all probability, my man will receive his 'marching orders' for Bicester or Bletchley. In fact, as my friends very justly observe, 'They never know where to have me.'

'Well, good-bye, Tommy,' I overheard another pad groom say to my own trusty henchman, as he bade him

farewell at the end of one hunting season—'good-bye, old feller, I su'pose with that there shifty guv'nor of yours you don't know where you and the 'osses 'll be next November.'

'Not a notion,' was the reply. 'I did 'ear some talk about Ireland, but I shouldn't wonder, between you and me, if it wasn't the Vale of Aylesbury after all. Now I come to think of it, we ain't been there since we was up at the 'Varsity.'

In strict accordance, therefore, with my variable character, a year or two ago found me, together with sundry other jovial bachelor sportsmen, located at that very comfortable old-fashioned hotel and posting-house, to wit, the Crown, at Barleyford, for the express purpose of hunting with that justly celebrated pack, the 'V.H.H.,' otherwise the Vale of Hogwash Hounds.

Well, soon after Christmas there arrived, one fine night, that inveterate enemy to fox-hunting, Mr. John —or, to speak of him by his best known title, Mr. Jack Frost. His unwelcome appearance was promptly made the excuse by my companions for a run up to town to see the pantomimes, and, as they facetiously put it, to have their hair cut. 'Of course,' said they, 'you'll come too, eh, old chappie?'

They were wrong, however, for once in a way, for the old chappie had already made up his mind to do nothing of the kind.

I determined, in fact, at the risk of appearing churlish, to remain where I was. For, thought I to myself, the frost probably won't last more than a fortnight at the very outside, probably not that; and

what will happen if I go to town with my volatile friends? Why, I shall be dining at my club, stewing in hot theatres, participating in lively little supper-parties, and generally turning night into day, and, finally, when the frost breaks up, shall find myself back here, entirely out of condition, and with shattered nerves—in short, quite unable (in hunting phraseology) 'to go a yard.' 'No, no,' said I, shaking my head in response to their protestations and entreaties; 'I am as fit as a fiddle just now, my boys, and, with due deference to all of you, in that enviable position I intend to remain if possible.'

True to my resolution, I did stay behind, and I don't mind confessing that, notwithstanding the arrival of a big box from Mudie's of all the newest things in novels, and all the magazines and newspapers to be bought for money, I was obliged to admit to myself that my friends were not far wrong when they one and all prognosticated that I should find myself in my self-imposed solitude 'as dull as ditchwater.' At the end of the third day there was no mistake at all about it: I was heartily sick of it. I was dull—intolerably dull! For two pins, in fact, I would have ordered my portmanteaus to be packed, and been off. Nothing but fear of the chaff with which I knew I should be received if I did, prevented me.

Now, every night as I lay on the sofa in front of the fire, smoking and pretending to read, I used to hear sounds of revelry going on in a distant room, that in my bored frame of mind made me positively envious. I found, too, that whilst the noise went on, it was quite out of the question to give the slightest attention to

the book I happened to be reading, no matter how interesting.

At length, one evening, as I was trying to read, an extra loud 'Ha! ha! ha! Haw! haw! haw!' followed by much stamping of feet and thumping of glasses and fists on a table caused me to shy the volume into the corner of the room in a rage, and to ring the bell furiously.

'Confound the fellows!' I exclaimed. 'What a good story that must have been, I know! Why cannot I enjoy it as well as they?'

'Tell Mr. Magnum (the landlord) I shall be glad if he will come and speak to me for a moment,' said I to the waiter who answered my summons.

'Oh, I say, Magnum,' I blurted out impatiently to my cheery host on his making his appearance, 'I can't stand this sort of thing any longer; 'pon my soul I can't. I *am* so bored and sick of my own company, I can't tell you. There appears to be a festive lot somewhere upon the premises. Who are they? Can't I join 'em?'

'Ah,' replied my landlord, with a sympathetic air, 'I was afraid, sir, you'd find it none too lively, now the other hunting gentlemen have left us. The noise you hear proceeds from the members of a little club, which meets here most nights, composed of some of the townspeople and folk round about. Mostly all sporting characters they are—in fact, sir, that's one of the qualifications of the club, that the members must be either connected with sport of some kind, or else be partial to it. Another rule is that each member must either sing a song or tell a story at least once a month. If he don't,

it's a fine of "glasses round." The "Horse-shoe Club" we call it, and I'm quite sure, sir, that if you would so far condescend to drop in and smoke a cigar in their company, they would esteem it as a most distinguished honour, sir. I 'appen,' he added, with an air of some consequence, 'to occupy the chair (he pronounced it 'cheer') to-night myself, and I shall (with a bow) be both proud and 'appy to interduce you to the club, if you think proper to join us for half an hour.'

'Come on,' said I, delighted at the notion. 'Let us go at once, if not sooner.'

Suffice it to say that in less than five minutes I, having been duly presented to the assembled company by Mr. Magnum, was unanimously elected an honorary member of the 'Horse-shoe Club.' I remember how I qualified myself for membership by standing 'glasses round,' and by singing 'John Peel' (encored) in my very best style. I remember that I consumed in the course of the evening more gin-and-water hot than I ever did before in my life, and I also remember the very perfect thing in headaches I woke up with on the following morning. Headache or no headache, however, my first visit was by no manner of means the last, and this series of stories are some selected by me from those I heard during my membership of the 'Horse-shoe Club.' I only wish I could tell them half as racily and well as the original narrators.

HOW BEEFEATER WON THE DERBY

THE LITERARY GENTLEMAN'S STORY

Amongst the varied company with whom I hob-nobbed during my nocturnal visits to the 'Horse-shoe Club' was a rather out-at-elbows-looking gentleman, evidently much looked up to by the members—his opinion, indeed, being law on everything, apparently. He was a Mr. Francis Flipperly, and, I believe, occupied at that time the post of sub-editor to that well-known journal, the *Barleyford Gazette and Featherbedshire Advertiser*.

'A great *scholard*, sir,' wheezed old Drencher, the veterinary surgeon, in my ear. 'A *littery* gent, so I'm told,' he continued, 'and *wery* clever. A most amoosing feller he is, too, 'ticklarly when he's had a glass or two. Sings a hexcellent song, and,' wound up Drencher, with an admiring glance at the object of his eulogy, 'plays the Jew's 'arp as I never heerd it played yet.'

A man possessing such rare gifts as these was, of course, worth cultivating, so I lost no time, the reader may depend, in making his acquaintance; and I am bound to say that his admirers at the club had not at

all overrated his social qualities. He could mimic, he could sing, ventriloquize—was, in short, one of those talented natives of Bohemia one so often comes across, who, had he possessed the same power of application that he had of amusing people, would have made a name in the world; in plain English, he was nobody's enemy but his own. Finding that I possessed sundry old sporting books that he said would be useful to him for reference, I made him free of my sitting-room at the inn during my stay, bidding him at the same time be sure and make himself at home and order whatever he pleased at my expense. As one fine afternoon, on my return from hunting, I found him gracefully reclining on the floor, with his head in the coal-scuttle, I think I may take it that he took me at my word.

After I had left the inn, finding that several incidents in the story that I had heard him relate at the club had escaped my memory, I wrote to him to ask if he would kindly refresh it for me.

My good-natured Bohemian acquaintance more than met my requirements, for he took the trouble to write me, not only the entire story, but sundry addenda which he had omitted when relating it *vivâ voce* at the 'Horse-shoe Club.'

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS BY FRANCIS FLIPPERLY, 'GENTLEMAN AT LARGE' AND 'MAN OF LETTERS' (REGISTERED, WHEN HE CAN GET 'EM).

To the Readers (dear and gentle—or otherwise, as the case may be):

Have you ever woke up of a morning very much alive

to the fact that you possess a remarkably fine appetite for breakfast, and no visible means of satisfying the same?

I sincerely hope not, because you may take the word of One Who Knows that it is a most uncomfortable and unpleasant feeling, and, moreover, one extremely apt to raise ungentlemanly and coarse ideas in a man's mind—such, for instance, as not only wondering *why* he was born, but sincerely regretting he ever *had* been.

These, I regret to say, were precisely my own sentiments when opening my eyes one fine morning in my apartments *au quatrième* (that's a gentlemanly way, I think, of describing my garret in—well, I would prefer, if you don't mind, not giving the address; suffice it to say it was *not* in Pall Mall, neither was it in St. James's Street, nor even, indeed, within an eighteenpenny cab fare of either of those fashionable localities). Fortunately for me, I am what the doctors term 'a person of sanguine, not to say cheerful, temperament,' so, instead of wasting my time, as many a man in my position would, in useless groaning and repining, a plan of action which would not only have done no good, but certainly made me hungrier than ever, I first playfully shook my fist at a lucky dog of a spider, who, having just bagged an uncommonly fine fly, was about to eat him for breakfast, and then proceeded to make a mental inventory of my small (but select) wardrobe, with a view of paying a visit to the best relation I have in the world, my—oh, well, you know who I mean. Let me see, thought I, telling the different articles off on my fingers:



Dress suit: Gone.

Morning do.: Here (but I am wearing it).

Tweed do.: Gone.

Shirts: Gone—at least, all but a couple, one of which is in constant wear; the other has come in two. (Mem.: Wish it had come in four.)

Remaining items: One pair side-spring boots (the same as usually worn by gents when disappearing from their friends or making away with themselves). Rather 'so-so' about the upper leathers, otherwise in fairly good order.

One pair shoes, patched in more than one place, and a trifle 'dotty' about the heels.

One silk umbrella: A regular wolf in sheep's clothing, this little article. Looks five-and-twenty 'bobs' worth' all over when neatly rolled up and viewed from the outside. When opened—well, perhaps you would appraise its value at a trifle less.

The weather apparently being of rather an unsettled nature just now, after a short deliberation I decided in my own mind that I would keep my umbrella for a rainy day (in a literal as well as figurative sense), and subsist for the next two days on the side-spring boots. Just when I had arranged for a beauty sleep—as the ladies call it—before getting up, I heard a slithering sort of noise under the door, followed by a loud rap as from the knuckles of a human hand.

'Ere's your 'ot water and a litter for you, Mister (choke) Flipperly (snuffle). I can't come in 'cos my hands is (sneeze), so I'll put it underneath the door,' says the voice belonging to the owner of the knuckles.

'A letter for me, eh? That's a rare occurrence. I

wonder if I can reach it without getting out of bed. I will try, at all events.'

I *do* try, and after an acrobatic performance that would have done credit to a professional gymnast, succeeded in dragging the letter, now somewhat soiled by the dust, into bed.

Ha! ha! Methinks I recognise that fist. 'Tis that of old Mr. Sheepshanks, of Lincoln's Inn, my late father's solicitor, for a pony!

What has he got to say, I wonder? We will investigate.

Eh! What's this? Oh, by Jove! this is something like.

Thus ran the letter:

'[*Private and confidential.*]

'LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS,
'186–.

'DEAR MR. FRANCIS,

'At last I think I have found some congenial employment for you, which is for you to accept or not, as you think proper.

'Some years ago an old and much-respected client of mine, Sir George Cleveland, succeeded in winning (as probably you are aware) the principal event in the racing world—namely, the Derby—with a horse called Beefeater. There were a great number of particulars in connection with the race that the public at large were never aware of, or they would have been considerably astonished, I can tell you; and these the present members of the family are particularly anxious to put into the hands of a competent person for the purpose of

collecting them together in book form for private (and perhaps public) circulation.

'When down at Cleveland Court the other day on business, the idea was mentioned to me and my advice asked. Did I know of a competent person? I immediately thought of you, and at once answered in the affirmative. As the family are particularly anxious that the work should be put in hand at once, there is, I need scarcely say, no time to be lost.

'If you elect (as I fancy you will) to offer your services, you had better call upon me here at twelve o'clock to-morrow, and we will discuss the matter in all its bearings.

'You can believe me when I say that if this offer (as I am sure it will) should prove worth having, you may rest assured that it will be very pleasing to me to think that I have been able to serve in any way the interests of the son of my old friend.

'Believe me to be

'Your sincere friend and well-wisher,

'RALPH SHEEPSHANKS.

'To FRANCIS FLIPPERLY, Esq.'

To say that I was delighted when I had finished reading the good old lawyer's letter was hardly the word. The first thing I did was to jump out of bed and dance an impromptu breakdown, which dance I performed with such success as to rouse from his slumbers the 'perfeshnul' gent., as the maid-of-all-work of the house called the music-hall artiste who inhabited the room underneath me, causing him, moreover, to rise from his couch, open his door, and use language of the

very strongest description in the passage for my express benefit. Having by this time eased my mind, and being out of breath as well, I left off my Terpsichorean exercises, and proceeded to prepare myself for the 'promenade.' (Note, please, how, in the merest trifles in the way of expressing myself, my gentlemanly ideas still cling to me.) And my toilet at length completed, out I walked, with my head in the air, and my side-spring boots in brown paper, under my arm, looking 'quite 'aughty,' as the maid-of-all-work—who, I regret to say, was as familiar in her manner as she was grimy in her person—was good enough to inform me, as she looked up from her occupation of scrubbing the door-step, and made room for me to pass.

I will pass over as briefly as possible how I spent the time that intervened before keeping my appointment at my lawyer's. Suffice it to say that, having, by the aid of my boots, and my uncle, partaken of a most agreeable breakfast, I presented myself, punctually to a moment, at the hour appointed in Lincoln's Inn Fields, and, having sent in my name, was at once admitted to the lawyer's sanctum. Our interview, I am pleased to say, was short and eminently satisfactory. In the event, Mr. Sheepshanks said, of my undertaking the work he had written to me about (as if there was the slightest doubt about it! thought I), I was to proceed to Cleveland Court at my earliest possible convenience, at which place I was to stay until the book was complete.

'I had no objection to *that*,' he supposed.

'Not the slightest,' I replied. 'I can give up my—ahem!—chambers (chambers—oh, my eye! if the slavey could only hear me!) at a week's notice any day.'

'You will be well done by at the Court,' he remarked. 'It is a most comfortable house to stay at, I can assure you.'

'I have no doubt of it,' said I. (Visions of a French chef—a veritable *cordon bleu*, no doubt—dry champagne, and Leoville '34 flitted across my Sybaritic mind.)

'And the remuneration is—stay half a moment whilst I refer to the letter. Ah, yes, I thought so—one hundred and fifty guineas. It will be quite a small affair, you know—a mere pamphlet.'

'H'm, well, yes. Oh, yes,' I replied, with as careless an air as I could assume. (Oh, Lord, if the old gentleman only knew!) 'I should say that amount will repay me for my time and labour fairly well.' (I should think so, indeed!)

'That's settled, then. I can write to my client at once and tell him you agree to his terms; and, let me see, to-day is Tuesday. Shall I say you will arrive at the scene of your labours on Saturday next?'

'By all means; I shall be quite ready by then.'

'That's all, then, I think,' said Mr. Sheepshanks, rising to bid me good-bye. Then a sudden thought seemed to strike him. 'By the way,' said he, 'it has just occurred to me that the preparations for your stay at Cleveland Court will perhaps entail some additional expense to you. Should you be in want of some ready cash to go on with, I shall be most happy to make you an advance—say, fifty pounds on account, eh? Excuse my asking, won't you?'

No excuses were necessary, I hastened to inform him, and I accepted his offer with thanks.

'You old trump!' I thought, as I wrote him an acknowledgment; 'I wish there were a few more like you, old boy.'

Having arranged to dine that evening with the worthy old gentleman at his private house in Russell Square, I bade him good-bye, and with his cheque for fifty in my pocket, away I went, with as light a heart as any man in London.

The said cheque being converted into current coin of the realm, luncheon at the Rainbow is about the ticket, thought I. A pint of champagne with that meal, and a large cigar of the best afterwards, instilled most gentleman-like ideas into my head, and my first act in consequence was to invest part of my cash in the purchase of some gentlemanly-looking luggage, viz., portmanteau, bag, and hat-box, at a second-hand shop in the Strand, sundry other necessaries in the way of minor articles of wearing apparel being also invested in. I then took a cab and drove off to my chambers (I like that word), calling on the way at my astonished uncle's to redeem the sundry and various effects he was taking care of for me. Finally, having packed up all my belongings in my new portmanteau, I paid my landlady (who, after the manner of her kind, was as servile now as she was formerly insolent and overbearing), tipped the slavey to an extent she was totally unaccustomed to—my generosity, indeed, causing a black and white tear to course down each side of her countenance—and finally drove off rejoicing to a street situated within the region of St. James's, well known as a stronghold for bachelor quarters, in which I quickly found and secured a bedroom for the few days I had to remain in town.



Nothing like a good address thought I to myself as, heading my letter

'32, JERMYN STREET,
ST. JAMES'S, W.'

I wrote off on a sheet of the very thickest cream-laid note-paper obtainable to Sir George Cleveland, Bart., saying that if quite convenient to him I proposed to journey to Cleveland Court on the following Saturday, arriving at my destination, so far as I could ascertain by reference to the guide of that arch puzzler, Mr. Bradshaw, about four o'clock in the afternoon of that day.

By return of post came the reply, a most courteous one. Sir George would be most happy to see me on the day named, and would make a point of sending a carriage to meet me at the station and convey me to the Court.

A charming letter—perfectly charming! And how well the envelope looked addressed in the baronet's courtly, if perhaps a trifle shaky, hand to

'FRANCIS FLIPPERLY, ESQ.,
32, Jermyn Street,
St. James's,
London,'

and with a coat of arms on the seal almost as large as a pat of butter, if I may make use of such a vulgar simile.

When I went out I left Sir George's letter (by accident, of course) on the mantelpiece.

Result:

My landlord, an ex-butler, who, if he is to be believed, has lived in some of the ''ighest of famblies,' makes me a

low bow when I enter his house, and begs my acceptance of a few flowers he had just had sent him from the country.

Oh, what a hollow and sycophantic world it is we live in! Fancy being fawned upon—grovelled to—because one is in correspondence with a live baronet.

That is what it means—this sudden abasement of my landlord. And—h'm—yes, the feeling is not altogether an unpleasant one, possibly because I have been rather a stranger to that sort of thing of late years. I am no longer five feet seven in height, but six foot (in my own estimation, at least), and I accept the landlord's flowers with such a condescending, insolent air that I cannot help wondering afterwards why he did not then and there present me with the noble Order of the Boot. I am sure, had I been in his place, that is what I should have done.

But then I have some pride about me, don't you know.

Many men I know who, no matter how fine their apparel and general get-up, are as 'umble as so many Uriah Heeps.

I, on the contrary, always dress gay (that is, of course, when in funds), and am proud into the bargain.

But I am digressing. On the 15th day, then, of September, 186— (I do so like to be accurate), according to my promise to Sir George Cleveland, I took my departure from Jermyn Street in state for my proposed visit to Cleveland Court. The obsequious bow my impostor of a landlord made me when I entered the hansom cab which was in waiting for me I shall never

forget; in fact, the mere recollection of it is unction to my soul even to this day. The cabman, of course, asked double his fare on the strength of it, the landlord's 'salaam,' combined with my general air and appearance, having no doubt conveyed the impression to his mind that I was a distinguished ornament to the Upper House in some shape or form—a duke, in all probability. Well, he is not the only one. On my very last visit to the racecourse—methinks it was Hampton — Happy Hampton I believe its admirers call it, though to me it proved *unhappy* Hampton, my watch, I remember, was appropriated in the course of the day by one or other of the light-fingered fraternity who so largely patronize the national sport. True, the watch was only a silver one, and had not gone (until its visit to Hampton, ha! ha!) for years. Still, it was a watch, for all that, and I remembered the many times it had been the means of providing me with board and lodging—*watched* over my welfare, in short—another little jokelet of mine, please to notice, manufactured out of the very slightest material.

'Mr. Flipperly, how *do* you do it?' I can imagine I hear the reader exclaim. Bless you, my dear lady or gentleman, as the case may be, it is as easy as shelling peas when you once get into the way of it!

The very last time, I say, I patronized the races, I was addressed as 'My lord' by an itinerant card-seller.

Oh yes, there was no mistake about it; it was 'Card and markin' pencil, sir?' 'Race-card, captain?' to everybody else, but the moment the mendicant in question set eyes on your humble servant, it was, as I

have said, 'Race-card and markin' pencil, *my Lord?*' at once.

Nothing occurred worthy of note during my journey from London. Suffice it to say that I travelled first-class (for the first time for a considerable period), and that on my arrival at Slumborough Road, the little roadside station to which I had been instructed by Sir George Cleveland in his letter to book myself, as being the nearest to his house, I found a smart dog-cart, driven by a still smarter groom, and drawn by a magnificent creature in the way of horseflesh, awaiting me there, to convey me to my destination.

The porter having stowed away my luggage, and I having declined the groom's offer to resign his reins to me, away we drove in the direction of the Court, which was not what my charioteer was pleased to call 'fur,' being, indeed, but three miles distant.

'Always suit your conversation to your company,' being a favourite maxim of mine, and knowing that people who have to do with horses as a rule think of nothing else, I thought horseflesh would be a good topic to start the conversation with in this case.

Accordingly, I began by praising the proud animal between the shafts of the baronial dog-cart.

'Nice horse that' (I wouldn't swear, mind you, that I didn't say 'oss'), I remarked, in as knowing a manner as I could assume at a moment's notice.

'Ah, he *is* a nice 'oss,' replied the smart groom, brightening up, and glancing admiringly at the noble animal, the while he playfully flicked him with his whip across the neck, which he was arching so conceitedly (if I may apply the term). 'Ah, he *is* a nice

'oss! By Beefeater (that's our 'oss as won the Darby some years since), he is, out of a mare called Sarah Gosser.'

'Ha, the very nag my old friend Mr. Sheepshanks told me about!' I thought to myself.

'A good horse Beefeater, was he not?' asked I.

'I should *rayther* think he wos,' replied my friend the groom, who was evidently an enthusiast. 'The splendidest 'oss *I* ever see! Won the Darby further than ever any 'oss has ever won it afore, he did.'

I need scarcely add that my charioteer, having now got on to his favourite topic, the exploits of the gallant Beefeater formed the sole theme of our conversation, to the exclusion of all other topics, only ceasing, indeed, on our arriving at the lodge gates belonging to Cleveland Court.

A five minutes' drive through what those flowery-tongued gentry the auctioneers would term the magnificently timbered park brought me to my destination, and my friend the groom having jumped down, gave a large bell which hung at the side of the door such a hearty pull as caused it to clang with a noise loud enough to alarm the neighbourhood, let alone the inmates of the mansion.

Nobody but a baronet, thought I, could own such a bell.

Open flew the great door at the sound, and out rushed several splendid creatures to receive me. One fellow took from me my book and papers; another my sticks and umbrellas; a third my hat-box. There really seemed a man for every separate article. Behind these, again, directing the movements of his subor-

dinates with an air of placid authority quite refreshing to contemplate, stood a superior being clad in glossy sable with spotless linen to match, and of plethoric—not to say apoplectic—appearance. This was, of course, the baronial butler.

The house party were all out 'a-shooting,' he informed me, but Sir George was at home, and was waiting to receive me in the 'libery.' To the 'libery' accordingly he led the way, and in another moment the venerable owner of the celebrated Beefeater was shaking me by the hand with words of courteous welcome. What a delightful, charming old gentleman, possessing, as he did, all the dignity of the old school, with a *bonhomie* that set one at one's ease at once!

'A glass of sherry and a biscuit after your journey? Don't say no, Mr. Flipperly. I feel sure you must want it. Bring some at once, will you, please, Jorum? Now I come to think of it, I don't see that a glass of wine would do *me* any harm either.'

The sherry and biscuits made their appearance in due course, and the worthy old baronet drank to me, saying, as he did so, with delightfully courteous bow:

'I bid you welcome, sir, to Cleveland Court, and you will believe me, I trust, when I say that, next to a 'Sportsman,' there is no one I am so glad to see under my roof as a 'Man of Letters.'

Formalities over, we sat down and discussed the situation without more ado.

Once set going on the subject of Beefeater, I quickly found that my host was as garrulous an old gentleman as one would meet with in a day's march. However, as I am equally good as a listener—especially



when there is a decanter of tip-top sherry (as in the present instance) at my elbow—we got along capitally. Dear old man! I can see him now—with his two thumbs joined together, and his poor old head wagging, prosing away by the hour, under the firm impression that the distinguished man of letters in the chair opposite, who was alternately dozing and taking back-handers at the sherry on the sly, was listening to every word.

At length the old gentleman finished his discourse, at precisely the same moment that I had buzzed the bottle of Ammontillado.

'Well, we won't go further into the matter to-day,' said the old baronet; 'you're tired, I can see.' ('Oh, Lord!' thought I, 'I hope to goodness I have not been snoring.') 'So, with your permission, we will resume our conversation to-morrow morning after breakfast—that is, if you are sufficiently recovered from your fatigue of to-day.'

I thought so. I *had* been snoring.

* * * * *

'Well, my dear sir,' said my venerable host, the morning after my arrival at Cleveland Court, when, according to an overnight covenant, I accompanied him to the library after breakfast 'for the purpose of hearing full particulars of Beefeater's Derby victory'—'well, my dear sir, I have been thinking the matter over during the night, and an idea has occurred to me that I fancy you will approve of. I, as you see, am not by any means so young as I was, and I find my memory fails me at times—am apt, in short, to get confused when I have a great deal to think about. My son, too, is not only

very busy with his shooting just now, but he is a bad hand, I know, at telling a story, especially when—as in this case—it is about himself.

'Now, nobody knows more about the ins and outs of the case, or is a greater enthusiast on the subject, than my butler, John Jorum. A worthy man, sir, a worthy, good man, and a faithful servant, if ever there was one in this world. I have spoken to John on the subject, and you should have seen his honest face light up with pleasure when I made the proposal to him.

'"It will be a labour of love, Sir George," he exclaimed, "it will indeed."

'With your approval, then, John will be in attendance on you either here or in the Stewards' room at any hour of the day you please.'

I immediately expressed my unqualified approval of Sir George's notion, for indeed I had foreseen some trouble if it came to relying solely on my venerable host for the information I wished for.

Accordingly the faithful John Jorum was rung for at once, and on my selecting the Stewards' room for the scene of our conferences, and acting on my suggestion that we should immediately proceed to business, the gratified butler at once led the way to that apartment. I may add that I had three reasons for my choice of this room, viz. : No. 1, the butler would be more at his ease in his own castle, so to speak ; No. 2, I should be enabled to smoke (a vice I am much addicted to) ; No. 3, the likelihood of there being at hand a bottle of something good. You cannot think what grand ideas, what noble sentiments occur to me when, say, a bottle of brown sherry, or of something extraordinary in Scotch



whisky is available for me to put my lips to 'when so disposed,' as the immortal Sairey Gamp would say.

THE STORY AS RELATED TO ME BY JOHN JORUM, BUTLER AND CONFIDENTIAL SERVANT TO SIR GEORGE CLEVELAND, BARONET.

You say you want me to begin at the very beginning? Very good, I will; and I promise you I won't leave out a single circumstance if I can help it. Not that I think that's very likely, for I can assure you that every little detail connected with Beefeater's immortal Derby is so engraved, I might say, in my memory, that no amount of rubbing would ever obliterate it.

I must take you back, first of all, to the breaking out of the Crimean War.

The family were all seated at breakfast. (I can see 'em just as plainly as I can see you.) Sir George, my lady, Miss Eva, and the Pride of the Family as I used to call him—Mr. Frank, our son and heir—then a handsome young man, or boy, as I might truly say, for he was only eighteen, and but lately gazetted to an ensigncy in the —— regiment of foot soldiers. It was with a trembling hand that I brought in the post-bag, I can tell you, and I felt quite a pang at my old heart when I handed it to Sir George, for they were all talking away so merrily.

I had the news, you see, from the postman, who had heard it that very morning from the town.

'War's declared along wi' Rooshia,' says he, 'and there'll be some bloody work afore long, mark my

words if there bain't, Mr. Jorum. It's to be 'oped,' he went on, 'they won't kill the young Capting. But I'm afeard he'll never come 'ome alive. There's so many of them there Muscovys, ye see, that the hodds is ten to one agin it in my opinion.'

'Damn the postman!' said I to myself as he walked off.

I declare to you, sir, that this infernal Job's-comforter sort of language gave me a regular turn.

Well, the bag was opened, and the first thing to hand was a large blue letter for our young soldier, marked 'O. H. M. S.—Immediate.' He tore it open, got very red, and jumped up like one possessed, and danced about the room—actually danced about the room with joy.

'Hooray!' says he—'hooray! War declared with Russia. Think of that, all of you! I shall be a Captain now before I'm twenty. Hooray! One more cup of tea, Eva, and then I must go and pack up.'

'My darling boy!' exclaimed my poor lady, beginning to whimper.

Miss Eva proceeded to pour the tea into the sugar basin, trying all the while to be brave; but it was no go, and in another minute she broke down and began to cry. Sir George was the only one to bear up, and that was a hard job, I could see, for he turned as pale as a sheet, and was all of a tremble.

The news had reached the servants' hall, of course, and when I got to it, there were all the women in tears, of course. Old Abraham Long, the keeper, arrived soon after; he had heard the news, and had posted up instantly to see the last of Mr. Frank. I was glad to



see him, too, for he was the cheerfullest of the whole lot.

'Why, how can you all be so silly as to go for to cry like that!' said he, in his bluff way, addressing the company generally. 'Why, dang my boans and body! Mas'r Frank'll go in at them 'ere Rooshians, bless ye, like a dog at his dinner. Go along with 'ee! I'm ashamed of 'ee all, that I am. Come, Mr. Jorum, draw some ale, and let's drink Mas'r Frank's good 'elth and confusion to all the Rooshians and Prooshians as ever was born, dang 'em!'

And if you'll believe me, sir, that's just what we did, women and all; and I'm bound to say we felt all the better for it after. You'd have thought we were a lot of soldiers ourselves to have heard our big talk.

Well, in another hour our young hero and his servant drove off to the station to join his regiment at Southampton, and Sir George and my lady and Miss Eva were to follow by a train later in the day.

'And, Jorum,' said Sir George to me, 'you are to come with us. Mr. Frank has expressed a wish to this effect.'

So away we all went to Southampton to see the last of our gallant young soldier. Never shall I forget the farewell dinner Sir George gave to the Colonel and officers of the regiment at the hotel the night before the ship sailed. The dinner was cheerful enough: you'd have thought by the way they all talked that they were going hunting the next day; but when it came to speechifying, and Sir George got up on his legs to drink to the health of the regiment, and success

to the British arms, I confess my feelings got the better of me.

A fine, brave speech my good old master made, I can tell you, and so did the Colonel—such a fine-looking man, sir! He was one of the first killed when the regiment charged up the heights of the Alma. When he said, in the course of his speech, that there was no one in the regiment more popular with both officers and men than our young hero, though he had been such a short time with them, I could stand it no longer, but left my post behind Sir George's chair and went out of the room to have a good blubber, all to myself in the passage.

The next morning came the hardest task of all, namely, the final parting—for, of course, we all went to see the last of him. What a scene it was, to be sure! I seem, as I sit here, to hear the bands playing, the cheering of the troops on board the transport, and the people on shore cheering and shouting back again, just as vividly as if I was looking on in reality. There was plenty of noise and hubbub, as you may imagine; but it did not prevent my hearing Mr. Frank say to Sir George, as he shook him for the last time by the hand —both hands I should say—and, gay and cheerful as he pretended to be, his voice trembled as he spoke:

'Good-bye and God bless you, dear father! I'll come back safe and sound to you, never fear, and we'll lead Beefeater back to weigh in together after he's won the Derby; mark my words if we don't.'

I often thought of that speech of Mr. Frank's when we all got back again to Cleveland Court, and wondered to myself whether his prophecy would come true.



Well, time went on, and so did the war. I took in my own newspaper, so that I knew before anyone in the house how things were going on with our gallant troops in the East, and I may remark here that I found that newspaper of mine rather an impediment not only to my work, but to my recreation as well. First one would come into my room, and then another; one moment it would be the housekeeper (an unnecessary proceeding on her part, for I happened to know that she took in her private newspaper as well, but I did not mind *her* so much, for reasons that I need not enter into here); then it would be one of the footmen; next the upper housemaid—a very nice-looking young woman, I remember, our upper housemaid was, and I don't know but what—well, well, she married the stud-groom afterwards, and is the mother of ten, so I'm told, poor thing! (Mr. Jorum at this point gave a deep sigh, shook his head gravely at the fire, and took a solemn sip from his glass of sherry ere he resumed his narrative.) All of them came bothering about the same thing.

'Any news from the seat of war this morning, Mr. Jorum?'

What with the amount of handling that newspaper of mine got in the course of the day in the servants' hall there was precious little of it left towards evening I can tell you, sir.

Well, at last came the news of the battle of the Alma; and great was the joy all through the house when we heard that the hope and pride of the family (as I may truly call him) was safe and sound, the only disaster that had happened to him being the loss of an

epaulette, which, he wrote word, had been torn away by a shot.

You'll scarcely believe it, sir, but the moment I imparted this bit of news to the housekeeper, having just heard Sir George reading it out from Mr. Frank's letter at breakfast for everybody's edification, blessed if she didn't swoon right away into my arms before all the servants.

'Oh, Mr. Jorum,' she exclaimed, when she came to, 'is the epaulette a vital part?'

After this exhibition, thinks I to myself, the sooner, my dear madam, you and I come to a quiet understanding with regard to the future, the better, otherwise I shall be losing my authority amongst the other domestics; and that would never have done, you know, sir. I therefore astonished Mrs. Mulberry by a visit to the housekeeper's room that very afternoon, with the result that before tea-time it was known throughout the establishment that the pair of us had arranged at a future period—possibly when Mr. Frank had returned and Beefeater carried off the Derby—to mutually comfort each other in our declining years by uniting ourselves in the bond of wedlock. For the future, therefore, the impulsive Mrs. Mulberry was at full liberty to faint in my room, twenty times a day if she liked, without there being the slightest fear of any such act of hers causing unseemly levity on the part of our fellow-servants.

The next piece of news of importance to the family at the Court was the account of the Battle of Inkermann. (I pass over Balaclava, as our young hero, not being in the cavalry, was, of course, not there, and a good job

too, though, no doubt, he did not think so.) Here again Mr. Frank's good luck stuck to him, for not only did he get through that sanguinary day without a scratch, but he was mentioned in despatches for conspicuous gallantry in the field as well. The hounds met at the Court the day after the news arrived, as it happened, and everybody was asked in to breakfast. The champagne flowed, I can tell you, sir, and you may be sure Mr. Frank's health was drunk by all present, with three times three. I thought they would all of 'em have shouted themselves hoarse. He was a wonderful favourite with everybody was Mr. Frank, you see, sir.

Then came the siege of Sebastopol, and we all began to feel quite comfortable. It was only a question of time, said everybody; the Russians *can't* stand out against such a pounding as they are getting from the allied army very much longer, and then you'll see one fine morning down will go the Russian Eagle, and the English and French flags will take its place, and then the war will be over. Mr. Frank continued to write the pleasantest letters home imaginable, describing his life in the trenches, and making believe to his mother that it was quite a little holiday for him and the rest of them. The description he gave of his Christmas dinner positively went to my heart, as I told her ladyship, when she kindly gave me the letter to read. The dinner itself was bad enough, principally consisting of sardines, as far as I could make out; but when I read—when I read how they drank their champagne out of tin pannikins—three between eight of 'em—I could stand no more, but handed the letter back to my lady, and retired to my pantry, quite broken in spirit, to think

that such things could be in a civilized country. If Mrs. Mulberry had appeared at that juncture, I verily believe I should have rung the changes on her, and swooned away in *her* arms! Champagne in a tin pannikin! It sets one's teeth on edge to think of it!

Well, sir, time went on, and so did the siege. Except an occasional dash at a Russian rifle-pit Mr. Frank's life in the trenches seemed rather monotonous, though I fancy there must have been plenty of danger from those nasty shells flying about, according to all accounts, though he did not appear to think much of it, judging from his letters.

At length, one September morning—how well I remember it!—I don't know why, but something impelled me to take a stroll as far as the lodge before breakfast, and meet the postman.

What a heavenly morning it was, to be sure! The dew lay on the grass, sparkling in the sunlight like millions of diamonds; whilst the mist, hanging heavily over the turnips, pointed to a hot day. A covey of partridges were running on in front of me along the carriage-drive, where they had been dusting themselves, no doubt. W-h-i-r-r-r! Up they got. Ah, my boys, I thought to myself, it is a pity Mr. Frank is not here to make your acquaintance to-day.

The postman was at the lodge just as I got there, and handed me over the family letter-bag, which I opened there and then (I always kept the key), and abstracted therefrom my own private newspaper.

There was some news this time with a vengeance. Nothing less than a full account of the storming and

capture of the Redan by our troops, followed by a list of the killed, wounded, and missing of those officers who took part in the assault. I skimmed it hastily over, and—'Good Heavens!' exclaimed I, 'what will become of Sir George and my poor lady now?' for there, staring me in the face amongst those 'missing' (which, of course, I took to be another word for 'dead,' and so would anyone) was the name of Francis John Cleveland, ensign, ——th Fusiliers. I scarcely dare face the family with the post-bag, I can tell you, in case there should be any letter from any friend of the family conveying the bad news. The *Times* I took the liberty of putting in my own pocket until after breakfast, when I made up my mind to impart what I had seen privately to poor Miss Eva, who would in her turn break it to Sir George and my lady. It would be less of a shock coming quietly from her, I thought, than from any other source.

'Ha,' said Sir George, examining his letters, 'no letter from the Crimea this morning. Well, "no news is good news," eh, my lady? Where's the *Times*, though? John, get me the paper, will you?'

'It's not come this morning, Sir George,' stammered I. 'They—they've forgot it, Sir George, I expect; and it will be sent later on, Sir George.'

'Dear me,' continued my unsuspecting master, 'that is really too bad of them. John, you must send someone on horseback to the station for it, if it does not turn up soon. Can't do without the paper, you know.'

'Very good, Sir George,' replied I, leaving the room with a very guilty face, for I was pretty sure, by her

manner, that Miss Eva guessed something was wrong. What a memorable day that was, to be sure! I don't know that I ever passed a worse. The following one was almost as bad, for half the county called in the course of the afternoon, leaving cards of condolence. My lady, of course, took on dreadful, so did Sir George at first, but after awhile Miss Eva, who had the pluck of twenty ordinary young women, got him round to her way of thinking—namely, that Mr. Frank had, perhaps, only been taken prisoner; and very soon the idea got firmly hold of him that his son was still in the land of the living. My lady, however, would not be convinced. She shut herself up in her own apartments, and utterly refused to be comforted.

Well, sir, I was sitting in this very room two days after the bad news came to us, with a regular fit of the mopes upon me, and just thinking to myself that if this sort of thing went on much longer I should be compelled, in self defence, to take to the bottle, when who should walk in but old Job Faithful, Sir George's private trainer.

You never saw such a disappointed-looking man in your life. His face was as long as a ladder, as the saying is, and even his whiskers, which he commonly took unusual pride in, hadn't an atom of curl in them.

'Well, friend Jorum,' he began, seating himself, 'this is a pretty business, ain't it?'

'About our poor young soldier, you mean?' said I.

'Ay,' he replied, with a melancholy shake of his head, and, I could swear, a tear in his eye. (Between you and me, sir, I had no idea the man possessed so much feeling.) 'Ay, poor young Mr. Frank! and poor Beefeater! I

declare to you, I never was so disappointed in my life, Jorum. To think that I've got the best horse in England—that ever was foaled I might almost say—and that now all chance of winning the Derby with him, all owing to a lot of nasty dirty Turks and greasy Russians, is clean gone for ever. It makes me downright mad, that's the honest truth, Mr. Jorum. I can't abear to think about it, that I can't! It's too bad! too bad! that's what it is.'

'Well, but,' said I, 'we don't know for certain that Mr. Frank *is* dead yet, and even if he was Sir George would run Beefeater next May if only for the sake of his backers, that I'm certain sure of.'

'What! Don't you know?' exclaimed Job Faithful with a groan. 'Do you mean to say you don't know that Beefeater is nominated for the Derby in Mr. Frank's own name? It makes all the difference in the world. If Mr. Frank is really dead the nomination is void and the horse can't run. It's that which has put me about so terribly. *Now* do you understand? Oh,' groaned he, 'it's awful to contemplate; it is, indeed, perfectly awful!'

I said no more, but straightway went and fetched a bottle of the dry sherry we're now drinking, sir, and under its genial influence and—I hope I may add—my comforting talk, poor Job Faithful, when he departed to get on to his horse and go home, did not feel quite so despondent as when he came.

'Keep a good heart, Job,' were my last words to him. 'I've a notion that you'll lead the winner of the Blue Riband back to scale next year, for all you may think to the contrary.'

'I only hope,' replied Job, 'that your words may come true. All I can say is, that if such a bit of luck *does* happen, I'll buy you the handsomest diamond scarf-pin to be bought for money with the greatest pleasure in life.'

'I'll shake hands upon that, old chap,' replied I. 'Keep your spirits up is my advice, and look for good news. It'll take a good many of them nasty Russians to settle such a plucked one as Mr. Frank, and I shall believe in his death only when I see a doctor's certificate to that effect. No, no; there's life in the "young" dog yet, I'll go bail.'

The next person to turn up—which he did in a dog-cart from the Cleveland Arms, in a tremendous state of excitement—was poor Mr. Frank's greatest friend (and I may as well add at the same time, Miss Eva's greatest friend), Mr. Charles Netherby.

'This is bad news, John,' says he, as he jumped down from the dog-cart in his usual impetuous style.

'It *is* bad news indeed, sir,' replied I; 'but I've not given Mr. Frank up as dead, for all their talking, and I shan't believe in it until I know it for a fact from an eye-witness.'

'John Jorum,' blurts out Mr. Charles, and shaking me by the hand to that extent that it was numb for five minutes after, 'you're a man after my own heart, that's what you are. I'm quite of your opinion. Bless you! dear old Frank is no more dead than you or I, John; and, what's more to the purpose, I'm going to prove it, for I'm off to-morrow to the East, and if I don't bring "the bould soger boy" back with me, why I'm one Dutchman, John, and you're another.

Where's Sir George, John? Or, stay,' said he, as if a sudden thought had occurred to him—the sly rascal!—'where is Miss Eva? I think it would, under the circumstances, be better, perhaps, if I saw her. What do you think, John?'

'I think it would be best, sir—decidedly best,' I replied in my gravest manner (laughing in my sleeve, though, all the time, you may be sure). 'You'll find her all alone in the morning-room, I'm pretty certain, sir.'

Away he hurried, and the conversation was evidently an important one, for he never left that morning-room until it was time for him to be off again—wouldn't even wait for luncheon. Just a glass of sherry, swallowed in one gulp; and he wouldn't have done that if I hadn't waited for him with the decanter in the hall.

'Another, sir—just another,' said I, pouring a second glass out as quick as I could.

'No, no. I haven't time. Yes, I will, though; just to drink to the treble event that I'm going to bring off.'

'What's that, sir?' I inquired (not that I wanted much telling).

'Why, this, John: My fetching back Mr. Frank safe and sound. My marrying Miss Eva directly after. And last (but not least, for I've backed him for a heap of money, John), Beefeater winning the Derby! That's something like a treble event, eh, John?'

Well, away he drove at a pace that the Cleveland Arms nag was not used to, you may depend, and having watched him until he was well out of sight (mine were not the only pair of eyes that saw the last of him, you

may be sure), I returned to my room and drank to the brave young fellow's health and speedy return in a glass of port wine.

His confidence was certainly infectious, for, if you'll believe me, sir, before post time I had actually written to a friend of mine in London who did a good deal in the sporting line, requesting him to put me ten pounds on Beefeater for the Derby at the best price obtainable in the market. 'Never mind,' said I, 'the reports going about as to his not running; back him all the same, and if you hear any good offers going about to lay against his seeing the post, take them, for me, to another ten.'

I put this in, as I had seen it mentioned in the papers that fancy bets were on offer to that effect.

My friend wrote back to say that he had executed both commissions at a highly satisfactory price, and added that he thought me an old fool all the same.

'Ah, don't you be too fast, my boy,' thought I to myself. 'Wait until you see Beefeater (as you assuredly will) being led back to the scale after the Derby, with Sir George on one side of him and Mr. Frank on t'other, and 'tis then you'll see who's the "old fool"—you or me. Old fool, indeed! No, no; John Jorum wasn't born yesterday; don't you believe it.'

The next afternoon, with Sir George's kind permission, one of the grooms drove me over in a dog-cart to Job Faithful's, and there I had a good look at Beefeater in his box. Such a horse, sir! A bright bay with black points, and not a speck of white upon him with the exception of a star on his forehead. Well might Job exclaim, almost with tears in his eyes, as his favourite



rubbed his soft muzzle up against his chest, 'It'll break my heart (to say nothing of the missis's), Mr. Jorum, if this beauty here is not allowed to run for the Derby.'

Well, I did what I could to comfort poor old Job, in which laudable endeavour I was well backed up by his wife (women have twice the heart of us men, I always think, sir, and never throw up the sponge until the very last moment), and when the time came for me to start off in the dog-cart on my return journey to the Court, I was glad to think that our united efforts had succeeded in soothing the trainer's troubled mind to a certain extent, if not altogether.

The horse that was now being backed for most money for the Derby—in fact, he was first favourite—was a colt called Necromancer, and it was a curious fact that he should be the property of a rich gentleman named Maxwell—Richard Maxwell—who was not only owner of the neighbouring estate to Cleveland Court, but was a rejected suitor for the hand of our Miss Eva. I read in the papers—indeed, it was common talk—that, now Beefeater's chance of running seemed remote, Mr. Maxwell was backing his horse to win him an immense sum of money, and I well remember myself and others thinking at the time that it was rather questionable taste on his part, his doing so in such a very great hurry. Not only that, it was reported—I don't know with what truth—that Mr. Maxwell, who was a very bad-tempered man, had said, when he first heard the report of Mr. Frank's death: 'Oh, he is, is he? Then that's all right. *My* horse will win the Derby now, as sure as a gun. He had a good chance, even if Beefeater was to

run; but now he's out of the way it's a moral certainty for Necromancer.'

A nasty, unfeeling speech, wasn't it, sir? and I hope it was not true that he gave vent to it. However, if he *did* make use of the words he was reported to have, I can only say that, like a good many other would-be clever people, he counted his chickens before they were hatched.

Well, sir, the sudden shock occasioned by the bad news received from the seat of war having somewhat subsided, Cleveland Court once more resumed its usual serenity, and our daily routine went on pretty much as usual. Things were desperately quiet, of course. No dinner-parties or entertainments of any sort or kind. My lady still kept to her own apartments. Sir George went out shooting occasionally, but his heart was not in it, and he shot very badly the keepers told me. His thoughts, you may depend, were far away with his boy in the Crimea instead of with the pheasants. The cheerfulest person in the house was Miss Eva. What we should all have done without her, I don't know, and that's all about it. She and I always had a talk as regularly as clockwork every morning after breakfast, and you can guess, sir, what our talk was about. Nothing but one subject, you might swear. Oh yes, hers was a brave heart, if you like! What a soldier she would have made had she been a man! I often thought to myself.

Christmas came and went, and I'm bound to say it was the dullest Christmas I ever spent in my life. No 'go' about anything. Even the brandy round the plum-pudding, which I set fire to just before bringing

into the dining-room, went out the moment I set it down in front of Sir George, as much as to say: 'No, really I haven't the spirit to blaze to-night, Jorum, my boy.' The very mince-pies seemed to have lost their flavour. The news of the fall of Sebastopol had arrived, but no news yet of our gallant young soldier, and as yet no tidings of his friend Mr. Charles Netherby, bless his brave heart!

Once every week did Job Faithful ride over on his cob to inquire if there was any news of Beefeater's nominee for the Derby.

Poor Job, as the time went on and nothing was heard of Mr. Frank, seemed to lose more and more flesh, and to get more despondent every day.

'It's killing work, Jorum; that's what it is, and nothing else,' he would say, as he sipped his glass of port wine in my room here. 'There's that beautiful horse, never been sick nor sorry for a day; he's completely worn out old Jack Shepherd, what leads him in his work, bless you, and if it wasn't that my missus is always telling me to cheer up, for she says she knows it'll be all right by the Derby day, I do truly and honestly believe I should break my heart.' Before the old man would go, he always used to come out with, in a sort of desperation, 'I say, John, do you really think that Mr. Frank 'll ever turn up again?'

My invariable reply to the poor, unhappy man was, 'I'm certain sure of it, Job, and there's my hand on it!' He'd always brighten up a bit after that and would start off home again, doubtless to watch over Beefeater's welfare more assiduously than ever.

Well, sir, time went on: the trees and hedges were

beginning to don their green dresses; the primroses and violets put in an appearance; the rooks began to build their nests—all outward and visible signs of the arrival of spring—and still no news of our two young men. I really began to feel nearly as despondent as Job Faithful at times, and almost brought myself to agree with him that all hope of ever seeing Mr. Frank again was pure waste of time, when one day, happening by the merest chance to drive into the town to see about sundry things for Sir George, I called in at the post-office (as I always did on such occasions) to see if there were any letters for the house. 'Yes,' said the clerk, 'there are several. Here they are, Mr. Jorum, and one for you amongst 'em.'

When I glanced at it, sir, a baby in arms might, without exaggeration, have knocked me down. It was a good-sized letter, written in a manly hand, on foreign note-paper, and bearing a foreign post-mark. Here was a go if you like! How I got into the street I don't know, but I do remember holding the long-expected letter all the while as tight as wax, and I also remember that I made straight for the Cleveland Arms, and ordered a shilling's worth of brandy-and-water warm, before I dared to open my precious epistle. I could feel my old heart thumping against my ribs to some tune, I can tell you. The glass of brandy-and-water was drained to the dregs in one gulp the moment it came, and then, and not before, did I muster up sufficient courage to break the seal.

Such news that letter contained! If it had not been that I should have lost my character, for good and all, as a respectable man and a butler of (I think I may say)

high standing, I rather think I should have thrown my hat up to the ceiling and danced round the room for very joy.

It was from Mr. Charles, of course, and as he wished the news he had to tell kept absolutely secret (dark he called it) from everybody, with the exception of Miss Eva, he wrote to me in preference to anybody, having, he said, entire confidence in my discretion. (I can't help remarking here, sir, that in all my life I never had such a compliment paid me.) He had found Mr. Frank, he said, after a deal of trouble. Seriously wounded and taken prisoner at the Redan, he had been taken care of and nursed by some good people in Sebastopol, who, when the town was evacuated, carried him off along with them, for fear of harm coming to him when the allied troops entered the place. Mr. Frank had been frightfully ill, his friend said, and had completely for the time lost his reason, consequently it was a matter of impossibility for the kind-hearted Russian folk, into whose hands he had the good luck to fall, to find out his name, so as to communicate with his friends in England. However, he was now rapidly recovering. At first Mr. Charles feared for his reason altogether, but, thank God, about a fortnight after his finding him, it returned to him, and now it was only a mere question of time as regards his bodily strength. My gallant correspondent added, 'I want you to give the enclosed letter to Miss Eva with my fond love. I have told her all I have told you, so that you and she hold the secret in your two hands.

'There is one other person,' he went on, 'I think we can trust, and that is good old Job Faithful. Make a

point of seeing him as soon as you can, and tell him that he can count on seeing Mr. Frank at Beefeater's head when he returns to weigh in after winning the Derby, and tell him at the same time to put me on a monkey at the best odds he can get.' In conclusion, he added: 'If Mr. Maxwell had only behaved like a gentleman there would have been no secrecy at all in the matter. As it is, I am determined to pay him off, and am picturing to myself with fiendish glee the pleased (?) expression that will come over his face when, having objected to Beefeater—as of course he will, if his own horse runs second—I suddenly produce the supposed dead man. Oh, won't it be a case of "Sold again!" with a vengeance! I hear he has backed Necromancer for a fortune and does not intend to hedge a shilling of the money. As soon as ever Mr. Frank is a bit better we shall make a move to Paris, and from thence to England. Shortly before the Derby—probably the day before—I shall get Miss Eva to quietly break the good news to Sir George, and then, my good old friend, all Beefeater has got to do is to win to make our triumph complete. Mr. Frank' (wound up the letter) 'desires me to remember him kindly to his dear old friend' (meaning me, sir, and the tears came into my eyes as I read it) 'and say that he wishes you were here at his side with a bottle of Cleveland port and a devilled biscuit.'

I thought to myself, 'I wish I was, too, most devoutly. If I didn't make a man of him in two days, my name wouldn't be John Jorum. I *have* heard that the Russians live almost entirely on caviare and brandy neat, and what dreadful stuff that must be for an invalid! I don't suppose they have ever heard of

such a thing as a bowl of bishop in their blessed lives.'

What the young fellow who drove me thought of my demeanour during our homeward drive I don't know. I found myself bursting out into strange laughter at intervals, and I was conscious all the time of making myself ridiculous. I couldn't help it, bless you, if it was ever so. I was in that state of suppressed excitement that there is no cure for, except a regular blow-off of steam. And until I could get word of Miss Eva and Job Faithful, and tell them my news, I knew I should get no relief for my complaint. You may be sure that I did not let the grass grow underneath my feet in either case. It was just five o'clock when I reached the Court, and instead of calling one of the footmen to carry up the tea into the drawing-room as usual, I took it up myself. My lady was as usual in her own room, so I had Miss Eva all to myself. She knew by my face that I had something of importance to communicate, and her look of joy when I handed her her letter I could not describe if I was to try for a year. When she had torn open the envelope (which, by the way, she first paid the compliment of kissing) and read the news inside, the tears of joy coursed down her pretty face. 'Not much fear of anybody supplanting Mr. Charles in *your* affections, my dear, at all events,' thought I to myself. I don't think I ever did see anybody in all my born days look so happy as my dear young lady, bless her heart!

She meant every word of it, I am certain, when, having read his letter, she jumped up, and taking me by both hands, exclaimed, 'My dear old Jorum, I never felt so happy in my life.'

The next morning as soon as ever breakfast was cleared away, I asked for, and readily obtained, leave from Sir George to absent myself from my duties for a few hours. I didn't feel very well, I told him, and thought a breath of fresh air would do me good. (Oh, Lord, how guilty I felt when I said so!)

'No doubt,' replied the best and kindest of masters. 'If you'll take my advice, John, you'll go for a drive over the downs, and have a look at Beefeater.'

I need scarcely say that this proposal exactly fell in with my own views, and I therefore lost no time in ordering a dog-cart out. I described to you, as well as I could, the appearance of Miss Eva when I imparted to her my budget of news from the East; but I should be very sorry to attempt anything of the same in the case of Job Faithful. I couldn't do it. The old man, without exaggeration, positively looked twenty years younger five minutes after I had delivered my message.

'Nothing,' says he, 'will do but a bottle of champagne on the spot, and, what's more, it shall be drunk in Beefeater's box, and nowhere else.'

He went into the house, bless you, there and then, and came out with a flask of champagne, three glasses, and Mrs. Faithful, her comely face all smiles. The boy in charge of the favourite being sent out of the way, we all three entered Beefeater's box, and having first of all drank to the speedy recovery of Mr. Frank, together with one or two other toasts appropriate to the occasion, we finally pledged the beautiful colt in front of us. I made the speech myself, I remember.

'Mrs. Faithful and Job,' said I, 'I now beg to give

you the toast of the morning: Here's to the health of Beefeater, winner of this year's Derby, and the best horse in England at the present time!'

I have helped to drink a goodish few bottles of champagne in the course of my life, sir, but I don't think I ever enjoyed one half so much as the bottle we three consumed in Beefeater's box that never-to-be-forgotten April morning.

'Well, John,' said Sir George that night at dinner, 'are you better?'

'Much better, I thank you, Sir George,' I replied.

Miss Eva threw me a glance of intelligence, as much as to say, 'Oh, you deceitful old rascal of a Jorum!'

Well, sir, the time went on. The Two Thousand Guineas (in which Beefeater was not entered) was run for and was carried off in a canter by our rival Mr. Maxwell's colt, Necromancer. So easily indeed did he win that they actually took as little as 7 to 4 about his chance for the Derby. Report even went so far as to credit Mr. Maxwell with saying that he didn't fear Beefeater even if he did run. And, judging by the way he and his friends backed his horse, it certainly looked as if for once rumour was correct.

Job Faithful, however, was by no means disheartened by the result of the Guineas. 'Necromancer, I grant you, is bound to run well in the Derby,' said he, 'but as for his beating our horse! Pack o' nonsense; don't tell *me!*'

There was no mistaking Job's confidence in his pet. His betting-book (which he was good enough to show me one day) convinced me on that point, so much so that I astonished my friend in London by writing up to

tell him to put me another twenty pounds on Beefeater for the Blue Riband.

He wrote back that he had done the commission for me, and was good enough to add that, remembering the old saying 'There's no fool like an old fool,' he was well aware it was not of the slightest use his telling me that Beefeater had not a ghost of a chance for the Derby as long as Necromancer kept well.

'You never wrote a truer word than that, my boy,' thought I. 'We'll see which is the "old fool" when we meet at Epsom Downs after the Derby, and all I can say is, that if it turns out as you say, I'll give you leave to call me one as often as you please.'

Of course, we—that is, Miss Eva and myself— were now on the look-out for more news. We were not kept very long in suspense, for a week after the first letter I got another (of course, containing an enclosure for Miss Eva), which said that Mr. Frank was so much better that they were going to start for Paris—travelling by easy stages—the very next day. A few days after we heard again, saying that they had duly arrived in that gay city, and were staying at a small out-of-the-way hotel, where they were not likely to meet any of their countrymen. Their plans were to remain there until the Monday in the Derby week, when they would go to London to lodgings where neither was known at all, and there remain 'incog' until the very last moment, when they would drive down to Epsom. For Mr. Frank was not to show until after the race, when if, as was fondly anticipated, Beefeater won, and there was an objection to him on the grounds previously mentioned, he could at once come to the front and dispel all further

doubt on the subject. I should mention that it was considered advisable not to tell Sir George of the surprise in store for him until the Saturday before the race, for fear he should spoil the effect. Oh, there was nothing left out, I can tell you, and I chuckled to myself when I thought of the sweet thing in shocks the confident Mr. Maxwell would receive for his pains if his horse did by chance run second, and he—as he was sure to do—objected to the winner. Why, Lor' bless me, thought I, the poor man will wish that he had never been born, when he catches sight of Mr. Frank with his Crimean beard on him. Well, sir, everything went on just like clockwork. Beefeater had done a rare preparation—having, indeed, never been sick nor sorry, and was as fit as it was possible for a racehorse to be. If he did not win it certainly would be no fault of his trainer. Good old Job Faithful, always a modest man, would say, 'You see, he's such a good bit of stuff for a man to work upon, that colt is. Why, he'd almost train himself.' But, as I used to tell Job when he said that, he was fishing for compliments, in my opinion, and he deserved all the credit he got for the horse's splendid condition.

At four o'clock on the Saturday afternoon, Sir George, sitting moping in the library by himself, was apprised by Miss Eva of Mr. Frank's safety. I knew I should be wanted, so I was in readiness, you may depend, to answer the bell the very instant it rang, which it did before father and daughter had been closeted together ten minutes.

'John Jorum,' exclaimed my dear old master, as I entered the room, pretending to be angry with me, and

with tears of joy standing in his eyes—'John Jorum, I have just discovered that you are the most deceitful old rascal in the country. How dare you, sir, trick me in this manner for I don't know how long, permitting me to mourn my dear son as dead, when he was alive and merry all the while? You ought to be ashamed of yourself, John Jorum, and I hope you are. I've a very great mind indeed not to forgive you, and if it wasn't that my daughter is just as bad as you—if not worse—I wouldn't.'

'Perhaps, Sir George,' said I, 'you'll kindly look over my offence when Beefeater wins next Wednesday.'

'Well, perhaps I may,' rejoined my master in high good-humour. 'Meanwhile, I feel that I must have a glass of wine to drink everybody's health in, and at once. Fetch it up, John Jorum, fetch it up, confound you, and bring a glass for Miss Eva, and another for yourself at the same time, you old sinner.'

I quickly returned with a bottle of Madeira (priceless our Madeira was, sir), and we all three drank a glass to the healths of Mr. Frank and Mr. Charles, not forgetting the mighty Beefeater.

'I think I could have been trusted to keep the secret,' said Sir George, shaking his head, when we had discussed the affair in all its bearings, 'but, perhaps, after all, it was quite as well for my peace of mind that I was kept in the dark. Anyhow, there is only one thing to be done to make the thing complete, and that is for Beefeater to win the Derby.'

'That he is *sure* to do, Sir George,' said I.

'Oh, he is, is he?' was the rejoinder. 'You're so precious confident about it, that I suppose you've backed

him, eh? *Now* I know why it was you kept all this from me; you were afraid I should forestall you in the market! Ha! ha! ha! what?' and Sir George banged his stick on the floor and laughed heartily, in high good-humour at his own joke.

'That's it, Sir George,' I replied, laughing in my turn, as I left the room, secretly delighted at the turn things had taken, for I had feared at first that the joyful news might have been too much for the good old gentleman to bear.

I omitted to say that we all three—Sir George, Miss Eva, and I—agreed unanimously that my lady had better not be told until after the race, or she would inevitably spoil all our plans.

Like the schoolboys who count each day that brings them nearer to the holidays, so did I—now that I knew that everything was plain sailing, no breakers ahead; in fact, nothing bar accident to stop Beefeater winning the Derby—number off every hour that brought us closer to the eventful day.

At last it came. Sir George and Miss Eva, with myself in attendance as body servant, journeyed to town on the Tuesday, and drove straight to the hotel in St. James's Street my master was in the habit of using, and where rooms had been secured.

After dinner that evening, Miss Eva, he and I (they insisted on my accompanying them), paid a surreptitious visit to our two young heroes at their lodgings. Such a meeting as it was! There was Mr. Frank with a beard on him like a Cossack of the Don, as Sir George said; rather thin and pale, but quite as cheery as ever; there was Mr. Charles—well, I simply never saw a young man

in such spirits as *he* was. What a meeting it was! I declare it makes my old eyes moist when I think of it. When father and sister had done with Mr. Frank they both went at Mr. Charles.

'God bless you, my boy!' said Sir George, taking both his hands in his and squeezing them again and again.

Miss Eva, like the true sweetheart she was, said nothing—her heart was too full for that, bless you—but simply threw her arms round his neck, and, hiding her pretty head on his shoulder, gave vent to her long pent-up feelings in a burst of tears. A pretty pair, sir—a pretty pair as ever you set eyes on, those two were.

Mr. Frank, understanding the situation, beckoned his father into an adjoining room, and I (not being born yesterday, as the saying is) waited outside in the hall until the lovers had said their say to each other. I don't believe there were five such happy people in London that night as us, I really don't.

At ten to a minute the next morning there drew up at the hotel door a barouche drawn by four of Mr. Newman's best greys, the horses and postilions wearing rosettes made of Sir George's colours—blue and yellow. Oh, it was a tip-top turn-out I can tell you. Sir George and Miss Eva having got in, and I having mounted the box, away we drove, amidst a cheer from the people standing round, not because they had any special regard for Sir George, but on account of his being the owner of that popular favourite, Beefeater. There being a certain amount of mystery, too, about the horse's running, made it all the more interesting to them, no doubt.

In due time we drew up at the entrance to the Grand

Stand, and we all made our way to Sir George's private box, where waiting for us we found Mr. Frank and Mr. Charles. The latter and my master at once went off to the paddock in search of Job Faithful and Beefeater, the brother and sister remaining where they were, whilst I, in my capacity of butler, superintended the preparations for luncheon, so that, by getting things ready in plenty of time beforehand, I should be at leisure to attend Sir George when he went to lead the winner in. (You see, sir, how we had 'mapped' everything out.) Just as I had got everything to rights the bell rang to clear the course, and by-and-by back came Sir George and Mr. Charles, the former quite out of breath with his hurried walk from the paddock.

'How does Beefeater look?' inquired Mr. Frank.

'Splendid!' exclaimed Sir George. 'Job Faithful is brimful of confidence, and so is Jim Watson (his jockey, sir). Neither of them thinks our horse can possibly be beat.'

'And how is Necromancer? Did you see him?' was the next question.

'I saw him just for a second, and couldn't find a fault,' replied Sir George.

'Yes, and I saw Maxwell,' struck in Mr. Charles. 'He's pretty confident, too, judging by appearances—the brute! He'll sing to another tune, though, before another half-hour is over his head.'

'Lord, how we'll astonish him! But here they come. Here's Beefeater! Look, Eva!'

'Oh yes; how lovely he looks!' exclaimed my young lady, her face lit up with excitement as our horse swept down the course in his preliminary canter.

By-and-by back came the horses, and, having paraded in front of the Grand Stand, once more returned to the paddock on their way to the starting-post. Then came the suspense, if you like. I declare I wouldn't go through it again for any amount of money. I will answer for my heart going a good deal more than sixteen to the dozen—I know that. False start after false start there was, one horse—a grey—bolting and kicking and rearing. I thought the brute would never stop. I should have liked to have shot him myself. At last came the cry of 'THEY'RE OFF!!!' yelled by thousands of voices in unison. Cling, clang! cling, clang! went the bell; and then came almost a dead silence from the vast throng, as the horses were seen streaming up the hill, the grey—the cause of all the delay—hopelessly toiling in the rear, a good last. 'And serve you right, you perverse brute!' I thought to myself. Down the hill they came! In another second they were in the straight. Then came the exciting moment. But, Lord bless you, sir, it was all over directly they began the race in earnest! Our beautiful creature had it in hand the whole way. There was but one cry, and that was 'BEEFEATER WINS!!!' He and Necromancer came clean away by themselves, but Mr. Maxwell's horse could never get on anything like terms with ours, and he won, held hard, amidst a perfect hurricane of cheering, by two lengths, which could have been twenty, so Job Faithful told me afterwards.

'Bravo, Beefeater! Go and lead him in, Sir George,' exclaimed Mr. Charles, 'and look out for Frank and me in the weighing-room. Come on, Frank, my boy! What, you too, Eva? All right, darling, why not?

If you haven't the right to pat him, I don't know who has.'

So away Sir George hurried, followed closely by me to look after him; and meeting his victorious horse just outside, with Job Faithful at his head, *trying* to look as if it was an everyday occurrence, and failing signally in the attempt, he took hold of the bridle and led the gallant Beefeater to weigh in.

Down jumped his jockey, off came the saddle in a twinkling, and, followed by Sir George, myself, and Job Faithful (who had left Beefeater in the hands of his head lad), he entered the weighing-room. Down he sat in the scales, with his whip in his hand and the saddle on his knees.

'All right!' exclaimed the clerk of the scales a second after.

'All right!' I heard repeated outside, and echoed again and again.

'Not so fast,' said a voice just behind me. I looked round, and there, with a sardonic grin on his white face, stood Mr. Maxwell, the owner of Necromancer. 'Not so fast,' said he again. '*I object to the winner.*'

'On what grounds, sir?' inquired the clerk of the scales politely.

'On the ground that his nominator for the Derby, Mr. Frank Cleveland, is *dead.* A valid objection enough that, I take it, is it not?'

'Oh, certainly,' said the obsequious man of the scales. 'Perhaps, sir, you will kindly put the objection in writing, so that it can go at once before the stewards.'

'All right; give me a pen,' replied Mr. Maxwell, now all eagerness.

'Wait a moment, if you please,' now interrupted Sir George. 'You can prove what you affirm, sir, of course?' said he, addressing his would-be son-in-law.

'I go by public report, Sir George,' replied Maxwell haughtily.

'Then let me tell you, sir,' said Sir George, drawing himself up stiffly, 'that both you and public report are *wrong* for once in a way. My son, I am happy to say, is alive and well. But here he is to speak for himself. Pray allow me to present him to you. Gentlemen, my son Frank, the nominator of Beefeater for the Derby.'

So saying, Sir George motioned with his hand towards Mr. Frank, who had been hitherto standing in the background, but who now advanced to the front, whilst at the same time he took off his hat and made a low bow to the discomfited owner of Necromancer, who, throwing a glance of bitter hatred at Frank, and another at Mr. Charles, his successful rival for the hand of Miss Eva, left the room without another word. The news spread like wild-fire, and a perfect burst of cheering greeted Sir George and his son as they left the weighing-room, arm-in-arm.

'There, sir,' said John Jorum, rising from his chair, 'I think I have told you all I can tell you about Beefeater's Derby, and I fancy that you'll agree with me that, so far as Mr. Maxwell and his precious Necromancer was concerned, there never was a clearer case of "Sold again."'

It may appear strange to the reader that my friend Mr. Flipperly, having been commissioned by the Cleveland family to compile the facts having reference to

Beefeater's Derby, should have passed them on to me. He explained this, however, when he informed me that at the last moment his employers changed their minds about making public the story, their reason being that Sir George, a most amiable and kind-hearted gentleman, was diffident about hurting his rival's feelings in any way. Mr. Flipperly, anxious to see himself in print, protested, but it was no use: Sir George was inflexible. So, determined to make some use, at all events, of the interesting facts laid before him by the estimable Mr. Jorum, he sent the MS. on to me, to deal with it as I thought fit. Having first of all taken the precaution of altering the names of the principal performers (a thing the indignant Mr. Flipperly had omitted to do), I now present it in its original form to the reading public, with whom I trust it may meet with approbation.

A SELF-CREATED PEER

THE LANDLORD'S STORY

CHAPTER I

'Oh, it's *my* turn, is it?' exclaimed the genial landlord of the Crown, Mr. Robert—commonly called 'Bob'—Magnum, in answer to a unanimous call on him for a story from the assembled members of the club. 'Oh, it's my turn, is it? Very good, gentlemen; most 'appy to oblige, I'm sure, to the best of my ability, and mortal man can't say no fairer than that, can he, now?'

A general murmur of approval going forth in response to our jolly host's little speech, he lighted for himself a fresh cigar, filled his glass from the bowl of bishop in front of him, smiled pleasantly on the assembled company, and forthwith commenced:

It was in the early spring-time just fifteen years ago. I had only been occupier of this house just over a twelvemonth, and as it had not then acquired the wide reputation as a hunting establishment—I hope I may say a first-class hunting establishment—that it has now—at least, so they tell me (cries of 'Quite correct, Bob,'

and 'Hear, hear,' from self and assembled company)—business was, as you may understand, gentlemen, not quite so brisk as I should have liked to have seen it. Well, gentlemen, I had just seen the bus with a couple of 'commercials' inside off to the station to catch the afternoon express up to town, and having nothing to do and plenty of time to do it in—feeling a trifle hipped, too, as well, perhaps—I thought I would take a stroll through the town, and see how things were going with the neighbours. I hadn't gone very far before I ran up against our old fellow-townsman, John Bladebone, as good a fellow as he is a butcher, gentlemen, as I think you'll all agree, and I wish he was present to hear me say so.

'Bob,' says he, 'you're the very boy I wanted to see. I've just bought the sweetest cob that ever you clapped eyes upon. You know,' says he, 'a bit of good stuff when you see it. Come and have a look at him in his stable and give me your opinion. And I think,' says John, 'you'll say he's a beauty.'

Well, I went and had a look at the cob, and found him deserving of all the praise his owner had given him. He was a stunner, and no mistake at all about it. I should have liked nothing better than to have given his owner a tenner for his bargain, and told him so. Well, when we had done inspecting the cob, nothing would serve John but I must go into the house along with him and have a friendly glass and a cigar. I couldn't resist this, for our old friend, as you know, gentlemen, is first-class company at all times; so in I went, and John having produced some tip-top whisky and a box of cigars, down we sat to enjoy ourselves. We were just

in the middle of a most agreeable chat, when the maid-servant knocked at the door and said someone from the Crown wanted to see me immediately. I hurried out, and there, sure enough, was my Boots waiting for me with a message from the missus that I was wanted back at the hotel at once. A nobleman and his lady, it appeared, had just arrived by the down train, bringing luggage with them enough for twenty, and were ordering everything in season and out of season for their dinner quite regardless of expense. The whole house was in a commotion in consequence, and the missus nearly out of her mind because I wasn't on the spot.

'Oh, the gent is just about a swell, I can tell you, master!' wound up Boots, who was apparently as excited as the rest, and no doubt, poor fellow, was already anticipating the great pecuniary benefit there was in all probability in store for him through the advent of the rich nobleman.

I waited to hear no more, but put my best leg foremost and bustled home as hard as I could go. I was quite out of breath, I remember, when I got there, and had such a stitch in the side that I couldn't speak for a moment or two.

'Oh, Robert,' exclaimed my wife, 'where *have* you been? Here's the Earl of Ballinasloe and his lady just arrived (a honeymoon, I'm nearly certain, Bob), and his lordship is asking all manner of questions about the wine and other things; do go up to him at once, there's a good man.'

Up I went, you may depend, titivating up my hair with a pocket-comb on my way upstairs.

'Come in, and be hanged to ye!' roared a voice, as I

knocked in a respectful manner at the door of the best sitting-room.

I entered, and there sprawling on the sofy, with a large cigar in his mouth, and a brandy-and-soda on a table by his side, was the smartest dressed gent I ever set eyes on. A man about forty, I should say, with a red face and plenty of black hair and whiskers, and such a lot of jewellery! I don't think I ever see such a quantity on one of our sex before. As for his hands (which I could not help noticing were none of the cleanest) you could hardly see the fingers because of the rings that covered them.

'Hah,' says he, sticking an eye-glass in his eye and looking me up and down in, I thought, a most supercilious manner, more as if I was some strange wild beast than anything else. 'I suppose you are the landlord, aren't you?'

I bowed assent.

'Oh, you are, are you; well, you've been long enough coming, upon my soul! And now you *have* come, what have you got, pray, for dinner?'

'Soup, fish, a nice dish of cutlets or a roast fowl and bacon, or——'

'Tcha!' he exclaimed angrily, waving his hand with a gesture of supreme disdain. 'Tcha! don't for goodness sake, my dear man, go through that stale old formula. It makes me positively sick, it does, indeed. I'll put up with this sort of thing just for once in a way, to-night; but I warn you, if you expect me to stop in this place for three weeks or more, as I intended doing if I was comfortable, you'll have to find something better than this sort of thing for my lady and me to eat. I did

think of bringing my own cook, a French chef, with me, but I was rather anxious to see what sort of fare you innkeepers give the poor devils of travellers who condescend to stay with you.'

'We'll do the best we can, my lord, for you, I do assure you,' said I, quite overawed by his magnificent way of speaking. 'At this season of the year we are rather quiet, my lord, and your lordship's arrival came upon us rather by way of a surprise, my lord; but anything we can get for you, that is possible to be got, *shall* be got, you may depend, my lord.'

'Very good,' said my noble guest. 'Then I may as well tell you that I make a point of never sitting down to dinner without turtle soup—clear turtle, mind—and from one place only, the Ship and Turtle, Leadenhall Street, London. Write for some immediately, do you hear? Asparagus, too, both her ladyship and myself are particularly partial to, and it is essential for it to be of the finest and best to be had in the market, otherwise we can't touch it. Salmon also we like, and lamb—*grass* lamb, mind—and if you can get some strawberries ('Strawberries!' thought I, 'why they're about a guinea apiece I should imagine just now') so much the better. Now about your wines. I drink champagne always for dinner, taking a little hock with my fish. Have you any Giesler 1874 in your cellar? because if you haven't, you'd better lay in some at once. Claret I don't drink much, and as yours is pretty sure to be poison, we'll say nothing about it. I forgot to mention that we always like an ice pudding every night, with which I always myself take a glass of curaçoa and brandy mixed. Her ladyship takes maraschino. And that will do now,

Mr. Magnum,' wound up my lord. 'Dinner at seven sharp, mind, and see that you give us a good one.'

I was glad to get away, I can tell you, for my brain was all in a whirl with the long list of my lord's requirements. Away I went downstairs, two steps at a time, just stopping in the bar for a glass of brandy-and-water warm to pick me up a bit, and then off into the town to see about dinner.

I felt I couldn't quite depend on our own cook, who was rather of a rough-and-ready description, and not possessing a soul above chops and steaks; so I obtained the services of the professional cook of Barleyford, old Mrs. Slummers—you'll remember her, I've no doubt, gentlemen. She used to go out cooking a deal at one time amongst the gentry round about, and a first-class cook she was, especially if you gave her plenty of her favourite tap when she was conducting her culinary operations. The quantity of Old Tom that that dear old lady could put away when she was cooking you'd scarcely believe, gentlemen, unless you had seen it.

Well, the dinner went off satisfactorily in every way, much to our delight, as you may fancy, for we were on tenterhooks about it; and my lord sent word by John that both he and her ladyship were very pleased.

John came down and said they were the two best hands at a knife and fork he had ever seen, and he added that he didn't think what was left in the bottles would make a fly drunk.

Determined not to leave a stone unturned to make my swell guests comfortable, I wrote off to London for every luxury there was in season or out of it, including an unlimited order to Messrs. Paynter for turtle soup; and

having engaged Mrs. Slummers for the whole of their stay, I went to bed that night feeling mighty well satisfied with myself.

In the course of next morning pretty nigh every one of the tradesmen I knew in Barleyford looked in for a glass and to hear the latest news about the rich stranger, whose arrival was quite 'the talk o' the town,' as the saying is. The fact was that Joe, the Boots, on the strength of the half a crown that the noble lord had chucked him for taking up his luggage on his arrival, had gone and spread such stories about him all over the place as never were. It was as much as I could do to make Joe ordinarily attentive to the commercials staying in the house, and two of them, indeed, complained to me about him during their stay. He hadn't even blacked their boots properly, they said.

I felt rather proud of my visitors myself, I must say, and on John Bladebone and old Tommy Cripps, the barber, that's dead and gone—him that was clerk of the course to our races, as you may recollect—coming into the bar, I asked 'em into my snuggery, and insisted on their partaking of a bottle of champagne at my expense, just to drink luck to the house. Well, old Tommy Cripps was a dry old stick as ever lived, and nothing pleased him better, as I dare say some of you remember, than disparaging anything that anybody else thought a deal of. If you bought a horse, for instance, and asked Tommy's opinion of it, he was perfectly certain to run him down, though he really liked him as much as you did yourself, and would walk off, leaving one perfectly mad at his remarks. That is just what he did in the present instance.

He listened most attentively, with his head cocked on one side, like a parrot, as usual, without saying a word, whilst I was giving a glowing account of my noble visitor and his magnificent ways. Then he began, in his usual style:

'He is an Irishman, you say, Mr. Magnum?' says he.

'I suppose so,' I replied; 'he told me that he lived, when he was at home, at Ballinasloe Castle, somewhere or another in Ireland; I forget exactly what the name of the county was. He only goes there for the snipe shooting, he says.'

'Ah,' croaked Tommy, 'I hope, for your sake, my good friend, that your noble visitor's estate ain't in "Airshire." You're a good-natured, easy man, Bob, I know,' he went on, 'and consequently easily took in, and, if you'll take my advice, my friend, you'll send in your bill at the end of the week, *sharp*.'

'Why, you don't mean to insinuate that the noble lord *ain't* a noble lord, do you?' exclaimed I, an uncomfortable sensation, just like a lot of cold water being thrown down my back, coming over me at the mere notion of such a thing.

'I insinuate nothing,' replied Tommy; 'I only say be careful, that's all. No harm in saying that much, I s'pose?' And with that the old croaker bid us good-morning, and took himself off.

And a good job, too, thought I to myself, you nasty, mischief-making old beggar, you! Left to myself, however, I began to ruminate over what Tommy had said, for, with all his love of saying disagreeable things, I knew him to be as shrewd an old chap as you would find in a day's march. Just as I was busy with the aid

of a toothpick (a great assistance I always fancy on such occasions) turning the matter over in my mind, John, the waiter, appeared with a message from my lord to say that he would thank me to come upstairs and speak to him for a moment.

I stepped up accordingly, and, entering the room, found myself in the presence, not of my lord, but her ladyship as well.

Have I described him? Well, if I haven't, he was not unlike Lord Dundreary, if you can imagine that eccentric nobleman without a moustache. My lady (who I now beheld for the first time) I know I haven't. She was young, and, to my mind, pretty, certainly; but she somehow didn't seem to have that *distangy* appearance with her that one expects in a bred and born aristocrat; she seemed a bit ill at ease, too, and shocking untidy about her feet. Nothing looks so slovenly, in my opinion, in anyone—man or woman—as shoes down at heel. However, I didn't think much of that. I had always been given to understand the Irish were a slovenly lot, and no doubt, thought I, my lord, like many a sprig of nobility before him, had married a trifle beneath him in station.

When she opened her mouth, though, I felt more convinced than before that her birth was hardly on the same level as her husband's, for, addressing him as Dinny, she suggested that perhaps the gentleman (meaning me) would like to join him in a glass of wine.

And when he gave her a frown, as much as to say, 'Don't be a fool!' she turned crusty at once, and told him not to be so 'igh and mighty all of a sudding—she spoke just like that. This I thought queer, very

queer. However, as long as he was all right, what did it matter what *she* was? I said to myself. Why, I had heard of noblemen marrying dairymaids and suchlike before now, and, for what I knew, she might be one of the same sort.

Well, gentlemen, Lord and Lady Ballinasloe had been with us exactly a week, during which period my lord devoted his time between driving about to all the places of interest in the neighbourhood and living on the fat of the land. They *did* eat and drink to some tune, I can tell you. Very affable they both were, too, always asking me or my wife to come upstairs and have a glass of wine.

Meanwhile, old Tommy Cripps, who made a point of dropping in at least once a day, kept shaking his head and badgering one with his dark hints as to the solvency of my lord. 'You take my advice,' he kept on saying: 'send in the bill at the end of the week, just the same as you would to any other stranger. A lord, indeed! Blow lords, I say!'

Well, Tommy worried me to that extent that when the week was up I really do believe I *should* have sent in my little account had it not been for a circumstance that occurred that very morning, which had the effect of putting me completely at my ease. The aristocratic pair had gone out for a carriage drive directly after luncheon, and John, going into their sitting-room, saw something which attracted his attention. He picked it up, and lo and behold! it was a hundred pound Bank of England note.

He promptly pocketed it, and when my lord came in he asked him if he had lost such an article.

'Stop a minute and I'll see,' said his lordship, pulling out an elaborate note-case, which John said was crammed with paper-money.

My lord looked through this, and then, turning to John, told him that a hundred pounder was missing sure enough. So John handed him the one he had picked up, receiving in return a sovereign for his honesty. He came down into the bar and related the circumstance just as I was in the act of making out my lord's bill, which, on hearing this little story of the waiter, I promptly put away in my drawer, wondering at the same time I could have been such an ass as to listen to that venomous old Tommy Cripps, whose interference I put down to envy at my good fortune, and nothing else.

To make a long story short, they stopped with me exactly three weeks. My bill was asked for about an hour before they left, and having taken it up myself, my lord, merely looking at the total, wrote me out a cheque for £150, the amount being £124 10s. He expressed himself very well pleased at his stay, said they had both been extremely comfortable, and added that he should have the greatest pleasure in recommending the house to any of his friends who were moving that way—in fact, behaved quite as a peer of the realm should do. Finally, having received his change, and, as I heard afterwards, given a liberal douceur to all the servants, away he and my lady drove to the station, *en route* to London.

Old Tommy Cripps was in the bar at the time and saw them start; and when I came in, all smiles, from seeing them off, he croaked out in his usual style:

'Well, so your lord's gone. Has he paid you all right, eh?'

'Of course he has; look at that if you don't believe me,' I replied, taking my lord's cheque from my waistcoat pocket and flourishing it before his eyes.

'Ugh!' sneered Tommy; 'that ain't only a bit o' paper, that ain't. Don't yer be too sartin, friend Bobby; it ain't honoured yet.'

With which reminder Tommy Cripps finished his whisky-and-water with a growl, and slunk off with his hands behind his back as usual.

You'll hardly believe it, gentlemen, but I'll be hanged if old Tommy wasn't right, after all! The cheque being a 'crossed' one, had to go through my banker's hands in the usual course, and you can imagine my horror and disgust when, two days afterwards, the draft was returned with 'Account closed' scrawled upon it.

'Good Lord!' ejaculated Mr. Snapper, managing clerk to old Sheepskin, the lawyer; 'and didn't you ever see your money, Mr. Magnum?'

'Mr. Snapper and gentlemen,' replied Bob Magnum, 'I am glad to say that by a great stroke of good luck I was able to recover all of it, and if you will allow me a few moments' grace just to recover myself—for long ago though it was, I can assure you the bare recollection of that audacious swindle quite unmans me—I will tell you how I managed it.'

CHAPTER II

MR. MAGNUM RESUMES HIS STORY

WELL, gentlemen (said Bob Magnum, who, having drunk a glass of bishop and lit a cigar, had now recovered his equanimity)—well, gentlemen, as you may imagine, I was about as wild as a man could be when I found out how I had been done, and what with old Tommy Cripps's 'I told you so,' and 'Now, didn't I tell you all along how it would be?' and my friends' chaff and condolences (which were the worst of all), I felt as if before long I must knock somebody's head against the wall. I employed detectives, I advertised, I did everything that I could think of to find my late visitors, but all to no purpose. The only result after a lot of expense being to discover what I already knew — that there was no such ornament to the Peerage as Lord Ballinasloe. So I let the whole business slide, and made up my mind to grin and bear it. It was the only thing, in fact, I could do. It was a lesson to me, of course, to be more careful in the future. Well, a year had gone by, and I had almost forgotten my woes, when one day—the hunting season being over, and business rather slack in consequence—having some affairs to see to in London, I thought it would be a good time for me to run up and attend to them. Accordingly up to town I went, and on my arrival put up at a quiet hotel off the Strand, where I was in the habit of going whenever business or pleasure took me that way. Well, the day after my arrival,

having transacted some business in the City, I was walking westward to have a look at the shops, when who should I run up against in Ludgate Circus but an old friend of mine, Jimmy Sloman by name, who I hadn't set eyes on for years and years. Oh, we were glad to see each other, I can tell you! He had been to Australia, he told me, made money there, and had just come back to the old country to settle down for good, and by way of occupation (for he said, though he had plenty to live upon independently, he was not the man to care to spend his time in doing nothing) had taken an hotel at the west end of the town, with every prospect of its paying its way handsomely.

'My wife,' said Jimmy, 'is a capital manager; a niece of ours—such a hand at figures, Bob, and good-looking as well—keeps the books; and last, but not least, I have got, far and away I verily believe, the very best head waiter in England, let alone London.

'But I won't go on praising up my own shop any more,' says Jimmy; 'you shall come and judge for yourself, and this very moment, too. One doesn't meet with an old friend like you every day in the week. Come, where are you stopping, Bob? because we'll go there straight (Oh yes, I *will* have my way. My wife would never forgive me if I didn't bring you back along with me), and you shall put your traps together, and we'll charter a cab to my place so as to get there in time for three o'clock dinner. We'll just turn in here and have a drink, and then off we go!'

And Jimmy seized me by the arm in the impulsive manner I knew of old. Knowing my man and that

resistance was useless, I resigned myself entirely into his hands for the rest of my sojourn in London.

A fast-going hansom cab quickly landed us at my old friend's hotel, which turned out to be a moderate-sized one, with an old-established and fashionable connection, patronized seemingly entirely by the aristocracy, and situated in the neighbourhood of Grosvenor Square.

Jimmy first proceeded to do the honours by introducing me—his oldest and dearest friend he was good enough to call me—to his wife, an active and bustling little woman, from whom I received a most cordial welcome. Next, the niece was trotted out for my benefit, and I found her—as regards her personal charms, at least—all my friend had described her and more. After that we went to dinner, friend Jimmy remarking as we sat down that 'the one and only waiter,' as he called him, was busy at that moment attending to the private rooms, so I must wait to have a look at him until after we had finished our meal.

'He's a treasure, I do assure you,' said he, 'and I'm proud of him, I can tell you. My only fear is that one of these fine days one of the aristocrats who patronize my hotel will entice him away. Several of them have tried it on already, but hitherto he has shown no sign of wanting to go.'

'An Englishman?' inquired I.

'No, Irish,' he replied, 'and one of the right sort, too, for he is an Orangeman to the backbone. Are you partial to the Irish, Bob?' said my host.

'Well, no,' replied I; 'I can't say I am. I never was particularly fond of them, and a native of the distressful

country served me out so, not a great while ago, that I have hated the name of an Irishman ever since. And when I tell you all the circumstances, I don't think you will wonder at my antipathy.'

By this time, dinner being finished, the ladies made the excuse of wanting to go and attend to their respective duties for leaving us; so Jimmy and I settled ourselves down in a brace of comfortable arm-chairs for a long chat over old times, with the agreeable accompaniment of coffee and cigars.

Jimmy having opened the ball by giving me a full and circumstantial account of his colonial experiences—in fact, all about himself since we had last met—it now became my turn, and I forthwith proceeded to pour into my host's sympathetic ears a full account of my experience with the impostor from Ireland.

'Well,' said Jimmy, when I had finished, 'that beats cock-fighting anyhow, that does. To finish up, too, by robbing you of a pony! I don't wonder,' he went on, 'you lamented a bit. I should, I know, if such a thing happened to me. Ah, it's a sad pity you hadn't had a head-waiter like my man, Dennis Maloney. Your sham nobleman wouldn't have inhabited the best rooms at the Crown many days, I'll go bail. You say you set the detectives on to him, but they did no good. I am not surprised at that. Meanwhile, though, tell me what the fellow was like; it's just on the cards that Dennis, with his wide experience of London life, may be able to "spot" him for you. At all events, there is no harm in trying, is there?'

'Not a bit,' replied I. And I was just beginning a description of Lord Ballinasloe, when a gentle knock

was heard at the door, and a voice, which somehow seemed familiar to me, said with a decidedly Irish accent:

'Can I speak with you a minute, sorr?'

'Oh, it's you, is it, Dennis?' exclaimed my host. 'Come in, will you?'

'My prize head-waiter,' whispered Jimmy.

And in obedience to the summons in walked—who do you think, gentlemen?

Why, as I'm a living sinner, the very man we were talking about, the hotel swindler, Lord Ballinasloe, as he called himself. Yes, there he was, just the same as ever, with the exception that he was in evening clothes and minus his numerous rings.

Directly the rascal caught sight of me he looked ready to drop with fright, whilst I myself was so astounded I could not find utterance for words, and as for poor Jimmy, he stared from one to the other with his mouth open, wondering what on earth was the matter, as well he might.

I was the first to recover myself, and addressing Mr. Dennis Maloney, I said, in a stern voice, 'Your master was just telling me, as you entered the room, that you might be able to lay your hands on a scoundrel of the same nationality as yourself, calling himself Lord Ballinasloe, who, a year ago, came and stayed at my hotel in the country, and swindled me out of a large sum of money. There is, I know, a warrant out against him, but I should, of course, prefer to hush the matter up if I could get some of his money. Do you think you could be of any assistance to me in the matter?'

'I *know* I could, sorr,' was the confident reply. 'If I could have a word with you in private, I think I could aise yer mind, sorr, with regard to the money in rather less than a pig's whisper, as we say in the old counthry.'

'Can I have Mr. Maloney to myself for a minute or two?' said I to Jimmy.

'By all means,' was the reply; 'I'll leave the room. He'll get it for you, if anyone can,' whispered my host as he took his departure.

My story is at an end, gentlemen. You perhaps will not be surprised to hear that before Mr. Dennis Maloney and I parted company he was the loser and I the gainer of the exact amount of the bill run up at the Crown by the erratic Lord Ballinasloe.

When Jimmy returned ten minutes afterwards, he naturally wanted to know the reason why his head-waiter and I seemed so surprised to meet each other.

As I did not want to expose the man, I left the ex-nobleman to explain the reason in his own way, and he did it in a way that spoke volumes for his readiness of resource.

'I have the misfortune, sorr,' said he, addressing Jimmy, 'to possess a twin brother as like meself as two payse. He it was, the blayguard, who wint down to this gintleman's hotel and passed himself off as a lord. And in order to save me brother from disgrace, sorr, Misther Magnum has kindly permitted me to pay the amount of the dit, sorr. And I now hope, sorr, for me own credit's sake, sorr, to hear no more of the matter.' And with a low and deferential bow to each of us, Lord Ballinasloe's twin brother left the room.

'There!' exclaimed Jimmy Sloman delightedly, 'didn't I tell you what a clever chap he was? And what a good-hearted fellow, too! Fancy paying that good-for-nothing brother's debt to you, like that! It's more than I would have done. Oh, what a treasure that man is, to be sure!'

'Yes, and what a rascal!' thought I.

A TERRIBLE NIGHT

THE VALET'S STORY

Amongst the occasional visitors to the Club was a smart, dandified, rather supercilious young man rejoicing in the name of Snobley—Charles Snobley—his occupation in life being to serve Colonel Arden, of Arden Court, in the capacity of valet and body-servant. Whenever—which was not very often—he condescended to spend an evening at the Club he was invariably, I noticed, greeted by the other members with, 'Well, Mr. Snobley, and how's your friend the gamekeeper? Pretty well, eh? Have you challenged him to a duel yet?' etc., all of which badinage the recipient received with much disfavour, to the evident amusement of the company.

The valet had evidently a strong grievance against some gamekeeper unknown, and curious to find out what it was, I made inquiries of the chairman of the evening, Bob Magnum, one night when the valet was present.

'He shall tell you himself, directly, sir,' whispered Bob. 'It's the greatest lark out to hear him upon the

subject. Lord! he did have a night of it, I can tell you,' chuckled Bob.

A minute or two afterwards he knocked on the table with the presidential hammer, and having obtained silence, said, 'Gentlemen, our mutual friend Mr. Snobley has not obliged lately. I have to call on him for a song or story.'

'Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen,' said the swell valet in reply, 'I shall be most 'appy to oblige, but I must beg you to excuse a vocal heffort on my part this evening, as my voice, I regret to say, is, owing to a slight "guitar," rather so-so; but I shall be proud to do my best in the story-telling line, if you will kindly give me a few moments' law to think over my "rapatwore," as I may say.'

'Give us your nocturnal adventure with Mr. Mallard, Charles,' said Bob Magnum, winking at me.

'Hear, hear! Bravo, Bob!' 'Yes, Mr. Mallard! Mr. Mallard!' cried the assembled members in high approbation at the selection made by our host.

'Very good, gentlemen,' replied the valet, with an air of Christian resignation. 'It is, as you know, rather a sore subject with me, but Mr. Mallard you shall have by all means, if you wish it.'

Accordingly, having taken a sip from his glass of punch, and cleared his throat with a genteel cough, he proceeded to relate for our benefit the following adventure:

I don't suppose if you went the length of England through and through, and Scotland and Ireland and Wales as well for that matter, you'd find three more

mischievous (micheevious the narrator pronounced it) lads than the three young Master Ardens, of Arden Court, when they came home for the Christmas holidays a twelvemonth ago. I don't really think you'd have matched 'em anywhere. What made 'em worse, in my opinion was that they went to three different schools —Eton, Harrow, and Rugby; consequently, being separated so long, they were doubly glad to see one another when they met, and therefore worked extra well together.

They say the Colonel's reason for this was because he said if they all went to the same school they would probably fight, as brothers always do. Now, generally speaking, you find, when there are several sons in a family, that they have different dispositions: one perhaps studious and fond of books; one idle and partial to low company; another with a 'ponshong' for rabbits and guinea-pigs, and so on; but these three I'm telling you about were all alike. Bless you, there wasn't a bookworm amongst 'em. No; manly games—shootin', huntin', and mischief, was their 'forty.'

As Mr. Bompas (that's our butler—and a very stout man) remarked one day when one of 'em laid down flat outside the drawing-room door and upset him as he came out with a tray full of tea-things (you should just have heard the smash!), they were regular young Behellzebubs, and nothing else. And just about the right age, too, these were—eleven, thirteen, and fourteen respectively. Well, as I have said, home they came from school for the Christmas holidays, riper for a bit of fun than ever. When I tell you that they went so far as to make an apple-pie bed for their pa, the

Colonel, you may imagine that they did not stick at a trifle.

'What did the Colonel say?'

What did he not say, you mean. In course he wanted somebody to vent his rage upon, and so I caught it. As if it was my fault! The boys, too, heard of it the next morning, you may depend. 'Play as many tricks as you like on other people,' says he (so the footman told me), 'but not on *me* if *you* please; besides, I reely do think you might draw the line at your father, you disrespectful young hounds, you!' They promised never to do such a thing again, and there, the very next minute, if I didn't catch Master Eddie—that's the youngest but one—extracting of the shot from the Colonel's cartridges.

'Whatever are you doing now, Mr. Eddie?' says I.

'All right. You mind your own business, Chawles'—they always called me Chawles for some reason or other—was the young rascal's reply. 'I'm only arranging for the governor to shoot straight, Chawles. My eye! What fun it'll be to see him stamp his foot and swear! Up 'll get a cock pheasant, Chawles. Bang! goes the guv'nor's right-hand barrel; bang! goes the left. On goes the cock pheasant as jolly as possible. "Damn the gun!" roars pa; "I declare I can't shoot a bit with the damn thing." And then he puts some more of my cartridges in, Chawles, and then he'll miss another cock pheasant, or pr'aps a woodcock, and then——'

'And then—he'll thrash you within an inch of your life, you infernal young scamp!' roared forth the ringing voice of the Colonel, who had, unbeknown to us, been

outside the door all the time, listening to every word; and, suiting the action to the word, he made a grab at Master Eddie, seized him by the collar, and gave him such a dressing with the dog whip he invariably carried in his shooting-jacket pocket as made the young limb laugh the wrong side of his mouth, I can tell you. Well, as I had plenty of spare time every day during the young gents' holidays, the Colonel requested me to accompany them when they went out with their guns, as they did almost every day, with orders to keep my eye on them and not let them get into mischief more than I could help. And being fond of shooting, though I had not been brought up to that sort of thing, I rather liked the job on the whole, and I should have liked it a good deal better if they hadn't been so rampagious. When they couldn't play tricks on anyone else, bless you, they were quite content to make fun of me. This is the sort of thing they'd do: One day we were walking through a small plantation trying to get a shot at some wood-pigeons, when bang went Master Eddie's gun, followed by a series of the most awful cries and groans you ever heard. 'Oh, I'm shot! I'm shot!' I heard him cry. My 'art flew to my mouth at the sound. Away I rushed through the brambles, tearing my clothes, scratching my face, and half blinded by a twig which had stuck in my eye. And when I got to the spot, there was young Eddie, as well as I was, and roaring with laughter at the fright I had put myself in on his account.

Another day when the three young gents and myself and one of the under-keepers were all out ferreting rabbits, young Reginald—that's the eldest—sings out to

me, 'Just pop your head into the hole, will you, and see if you can hear 'em moving.'

Keen as mustard, down I went on my knees, though it was awfully muddy; and as I was listening at the mouth of the hole, with my head on one side like a terrier, what does that nice boy Master Reginald do but take a ferret and make it lay hold of my ear. I jumped up with a yell, with the ferret hanging on like grim death, and danced about with pain like a madman, the three boys and the keeper all looking on laughing ready to kill themselves. I should think it was fully five minutes before they got the brute off, and then only by half throttling him, and not before he had nearly bitten my ear off. Oh, I was angry, I can tell you, and if it hadn't been that they promised faithfully never to play any more tricks on me, I wouldn't have gone out with 'em again, fond as I was of a bit of sport.

I used to enjoy, too, looking on when the Colonel had a battue. Sometimes I would load for him, and carry his cartridges, and sometimes join the beaters.

There was only one drawback to my happiness on these occasions, and that was the overbearing manner and insulting behaviour generally towards me of the head-keeper, Ralph Mallard. I will show the fellow up, gentlemen, very shortly. He might have been (and I don't say he was not, mind) a very good game-keeper, but personally I have no hesitation in saying that he was a BEAST—a nasty, tobacco-chewing vulgar BEAST!*

* NOTE BY AUTHOR.—Mr. Chawles Snobley not only said it but meant it, judging by the blow he gave the table with his fist, by way of emphasizing the epithet applied to the offending Mr. Mallard.

Mr. Mallard, gentlemen, had at one period of his career served in the Royal Navy in the capacity first of all of a common seaman before the mast, and afterwards as bo'sun. A great big bearded chap he was, with a voice like a foghorn and the manners of a pig, except when he was addressing the Colonel his master, or the other gentry, when he was all civility itself, and it was 'Yes, your honour,' 'No, your honour,' all over the place.

Well, this Mallard for some reason—best known to himself—took a dislike to me, and never lost an opportunity of showing it, and in the most offensive manner.

'Keep in line, you swab, you!' he bawled out to me one day when I was good-naturedly helping to beat for them.

'Who are you calling a swab?' I replied.

'Why, you, to be sure; you——' Well, I won't repeat the other words, gentlemen; they would only shock you, as they did me. I will merely say that he made very poor reflections on my parentage, his language implying that my origin, on the mother's side, was traceable to the canine species—in other words, 'the dog.'

Another time, when in the excitement of the moment I mistook a blackbird for a woodcock, and shouted accordingly, he insulted me in the most shocking manner.

'Don't you hanswer me, you breeches-cleaning, boot-blacking son of a sea-cook!' he roared, 'or I'll tie you up to that there tree, and give three dozen with this here *hash*-stick, for want of a rope-end, strike me ugly if I don't!'

I may here remark, gentlemen, that this latter observation of the feller's was quite out of place, for he was, without exception, the ugliest man I ever set eyes on—painfully so, indeed, with his snub nose, his pock-marked face, which always reminded me of a sieve, and his carroty hair and beard, for all the world like a dilapidated door-mat. I really can't account for Mr. Mallard's aversion to me, unless it was that he was jealous of my going out a-shooting so much with the young gentlemen. No doubt he would have liked to have had them given into his charge, instead of me, but the Colonel knew his man, you may depend, gentlemen—he knew his man.

The inference, I think, is obvious.

Well, gentlemen, it was just after Christmas. Arden Court was full of guests, and there had been a lively time of it for everybody, something going on every night; and the three young gentlemen, so far from being bilious and dyspeptic, like most people would have been had they partaken of Christmas fare as heartily as these three scapegraces had (my word, gentlemen, they could put the good things out of sight, I can tell you!), were, if anything, more lively and mischievous than ever. Fleas, bless you, were quite slow in comparison. Truffled turkey seemed to excite 'em, and mince-pies set their brains a-fire, instead of making 'em sleepy. I fancy, though, it was the champagne made 'em so extra rampagious.

Mr. Bompas took it upon himself to only fill their glasses half-way at dinner; but, bless you, young Reginald was down on him in an instant.

'None of your heel-taps, you old rascal!' said he in

a whisper; and poor old Bompas had to fill up the glass much against his will. Master R. tackled him the very next morning about it, and dared him to play him such a trick again. 'You treat me just like a grown-up man for the future, Bompas, or else me and my brothers 'll come and blow you up with fireworks, just like an old Guy Fawkes.' And, knowing what they were, and just likely to be as good as their word, he gave them everything they asked for in the future, whether good for their stomicks or not.

'I wish there was no holidays, Charles,' said the poor old man, with tears in his eyes, as I came upon him one day in his pantry ticking off the days on his almanack that there were left before the three went back to school.

Just to show you what a regular young devil Master Reggie was, I'll tell you something he did. He was up in London once, when he was a boy of ten or thereabouts, with his pa and ma, and for something he had done the Colonel ordered him to bed one day, and locked him up in his chamber accordingly. Well, that boy, if you'll believe me, began by smashing up everything in the room; even the bed-clothes he tore all to bits, and he finished up by throwing every one of his own clothes out of the window to an old Jew who was going by, crying out, 'Ole clo!' My eye, what a 'wallopin'' the Colonel did give him when he came home, and serve him right. But, Lor' bless you, the young dare-devil would have done the same thing over again the next day for about tuppence.

Well, gentlemen, as I have mentioned, it was just after Christmas, when one morning, as I was busy

varnishing the Colonel's boots, in came the three young gents, looking so mysterious that I guessed they had got some game on of more importance than usual, and so they had.

'Look here, Chawles,' says Mr. Reginald, who, being the eldest, acted as spokesman, 'we're going to have such a lark to-night, and we want you to come with us. What do you think we're going to do?' says he.

'Goodness only knows, sir,' replied I. 'If you was to tell me you was a-going to set fire to the house, I shouldn't be in the least surprised. Don't expect me to compromise myself, though, if *you* please, Mr. Reginald.'

'Listen, and I'll tell you,' says young my lord. 'The fact is, we're sick of shooting nothing but blackbirds and thrushes and rabbits; we want to have a go at some pheasants. That old beast of a Mallard makes a pretence of taking us to a place where, as he says, "the young gents can get a shot at a pheasant or, maybe, a woodcock," and when we go there, of course, there never are any, as he very wells knows; so we've determined to go poaching to-night, when everybody's in bed, and try and bag a few longtails as the beggars are roosting up in the trees. The nights are as bright as day just now, and we shall be able to see 'em beautifully, and then we'll bring 'em home and cook 'em on the sly in our bedrooms, and eat 'em. What a lark it will be, to be sure!' he exclaimed, dancing wildly about the room with his brothers, and singing, 'Oh, it's my delight on a shining night, in the season of the ye-e-ar!' loud enough for everybody in the house to hear.

'And supposing old Mallard comes upon the scene and catches us; how then, sir?' said I.

'Oh, don't you alarm yourself on that score,' was the reply. 'I've bought these little articles expressly for the occasion'—producing, as he spoke, four hideous masks. 'There,' said he; 'if, as you say, old Mallard does turn up, he won't be able to identify us; besides, we can run, all of us, I hope, a trifle faster than a broken-winded old pig like he is, or any of the other keepers either, if it comes to that, with their clumsy hob-nailed boots.'

But I shook my head and declared I wouldn't run the risk. Why, if it came to the Colonel's ears I should lose my place at once, I told 'em.

'Oh, nonsense! Pa won't say anything to *you*, Chawles,' said young Reginald. 'We shall suffer as a matter of course, but *you'll* be all right. Besides,' he argued, 'we only want you to carry the game for us; we'll do all the shooting, mind you. And just think, too, what a pull you'll have over old Mallard for the future; I know you hate the old beggar like poison—so do I if it comes to that. We'll go and tell everybody the next day what we did: how we went shooting at night like any other poachers, and never got caught. No wonder, they will say, pheasants are scarce sometimes in the woods. Oh yes,' wound up Mr. R., 'revenge is sweet, Chawles, and you'll join us, I know. Why, old Mallard will never be able to face you again, much less slang you, like he did the other day when you were beating and took the blackbird for a woodcock.'

Well, the end of it was, gentlemen, I couldn't resist the temptation of taking a rise out of my enemy, and I con-

sented to join them, not without sundry misgivings, though, all the same. 'And,' said I, addressing the three young gents as they left the room to get their cartridges and everything ready, 'don't you go and take too much champagne at dinner, else you won't be fit for nothing later on.' 'Don't you teach your grandmother to suck eggs, Chawles,' was the answer I got from the leader of the gang, as I might aptly call him. Clem, the youngest, was still ruder, for he must needs express his opinion of my advice in dumb show by putting his thumb to his little snub nose—in plain English, gentlemen, he took a sight at me. I didn't think that we should have been able to make a start of it until after midnight, but the fates were propitious for once in a way, for the Colonel, generally rather a late bird, took it into his head to retire early; consequently I was able to get away and join the juvenile poachers in Mr. Bompas's pantry, as agreed upon, very soon after half-past eleven.

'Now mind,' says our leader of the band as we emerged from the house, 'not a word must be spoken, recollect. You'd better all fancy,' says he, 'that you're a "Forlorn Hope," going to storm "Badajos," or some equally important citadel, and then you're sure to be right. And, Chawles, put out that pipe of yours; they'll smell tobacco a mile off such a frosty night as this.' Oh, it was a sharp night, I can tell you, and as still as still could be. You could not hear a sound, except an occasional howl or bark from the dogs at the keeper's house away across the park. Tramp, tramp, tramp—on we marched without speaking a single word for about a mile, when we came to the gate of a large wood, known as the Dean, in which there were a great

number of fir-trees. 'Here we are, boys,' said Mr. Reggie in a loud whisper. 'There are no end of the beggars snoring away here, including a few wooden ones. There's a stack of barley just about in the middle of the wood, and it's in the fir-trees close by there that the pheasants will be. I know, because I've reconnoitred every bit of the ground.'

'Why, what a splendid engineer officer you'll make, Mr. Reggie,' I exclaimed, still in a whisper, 'when you goes into the army!' 'Engineer officer be blowed!' he growled back in a contemptuous fashion. 'I'm going into the governor's old regiment, the Blues, you ass! Now then, boys,' he continued, 'on with your masks, stick your cartridges in, and follow me.'

Accordingly we did as our gallant commander bid us. The three poachers loaded their guns, and then the four of us donned our masks, and nice objects we looked, I can tell you. I think if we had come across any real poachers by chance they must have run away at the sight of us. Having done that, and had a good laugh all round, and a nip of cherry brandy to keep the cold out from a flaskful Mr. Bompas, the butler, had given us before we left the house, we once more made a start up the big centre ride, keeping well in the shadow by Mr. Reggie's orders. (Oh, he was a regular Sir Garnet, I can tell you! I never saw one so young with such an old head on his shoulders.) Next down a little side path, and then the barley-stack our leader had spoke of suddenly burst upon our sight.

'Now, then, look out for 'em,' whispers Reggie. 'I see one,' he suddenly says, peering into the fir-trees. 'I'll have the first go;' and levelling his weapon,

he fired, *bang!* and down flopped a fine cock pheasant, shot through the breast.

'A splendid bird,' whispered its slayer, as I picked it up. 'Pop him in the bag, Chawles.'

'I see one!' cries young Eddie, a minute later.

'Blaze at him, them,' says his brother.

Bang went Eddie's gun, and down flopped another. It was a wooden one, and you should have seen how wild Master Eddie was. Then Master Clem got one—a real one; then Reggie got another, and shot with his second barrel an old white owl that came flying out to see what the matter was. Bang went the guns; first one and then t'other. There must have been at least a dozen pheasants on the ground. Nobody came, and the boys got quite reckless, talking to one another.

'One more shot apiece,' cries Reggie, 'and then off we go home with the plunder. Lord, how hungry I am!' he added; 'I wish I'd got a sandwich.'

'I should just like a slice of cold plum-pudding,' remarked young Eddie.

At this point Mr. Reggie, one of whose cartridges had stuck fast, says to me, 'Chawles,' says he, 'just go to that further lot of fir-trees and see if you can see any of 'em roosting. I'll join you in a minute, as soon as I can get this infernal old cartridge out.'

I went accordingly, and all of a sudden fell flat on my face, having tripped over a wire which was fastened about three or four inches from the ground. At the same moment something exploded close to my ear, making the most terrific noise you ever heard. It was just like a young cannon going off, and for the moment

quite deafened me, to say nothing of frightening me out of my senses.

'Oh, I'm killed! I'm shot!' I roared as I lay prostrate on the ground.

'Get up, you great fool!' hissed out Reggie, running up to me and giving me a hand. 'Get up directly. You've let off one of old Mallard's maroons, that's what you've done. Somebody's bound to hear it, and we must be off at once, or else we shall be caught, as sure as a gun. Come, look sharp!'

I did look sharp, you may depend, and was just putting the thirteenth pheasant into the bag preparatory to being off, when simultaneously from behind the fir-trees rushed half a dozen men, headed by old Mallard himself, and surrounded us before we could make a run for it. One of his men collared a boy apiece, and he himself seized me, whilst an underkeeper took the bag.

'Thirteen beautiful cock pheasants,' said Mallard, as his man turned its contents out on to the ground—'thirteen beautiful cock pheasants and a howl! Well, you might 'ave left the poor howl alone, I do think. Fower on yer, and three guns amongst the fower; pretty good guns, too, I see. They're forfeited, in course. I gets *them*, as is honly right. And now, who are you hall? I demand of your names.'

'Oh, shut up all that rot, Mallard!' says young Mr. Reggie, braving it out as bold as brass. 'You know well enough who we are; give us back our guns, and let Charles there go, and we'll walk home. Here, here's a sovereign for waking you up.'

But Mallard protested he didn't know who we

were. 'Do *you* know?' says he, turning to the under-keeper.

'Noa, that ar doan't,' replied the brute addressed, grinning from ear to ear.

'Oh, nonsense!' said Mr. Reggie, throwing off his mask in a rage. 'We're the sons of your master, Colonel Arden, and this is his servant, Charles Snobley.'

'Well,' exclaimed Mallard, pretending to be quite taken aback, 'of all the—— What! You're never a-goin' to try and make me believe as you three gallus young poachers are them nice young gents up at the Court, wot comes out shootin' along with me dooring the 'olidays? Why, it's haddin' hinsult to hinjury, strike me hugly if it isn't! And to try and make out as this here low-lookin' feller is that 'ighly respectable young man Charles, Colonel Arden's "wally"—— Well, I ham blowed! No, no; you comes along o' me, and explains all that to the Colonel. I won't do nuffin to you pussonally, but as I consider this man here, being holder than wot you are, is the worst of the lot, I shall proceed to try 'im by court-martial on the spot, all fair and honerable, just the same as on board ship. Genelmen,' said he, addressing the half-dozen under-keepers and watchers, 'you know the particklers of this here case, so just consider amongst yourselves, and then hinform me, the President of this honerable Court, what your verdict his, and what the sentence is to be, death or hotherwise. You 'ave three minutes by my watch to think it hover in,' said Mallard, pulling out with much dignity the huge silver turnip he called a watch. 'Well, genelmen,' said he, at the expiration of

the three minutes, 'time's hup! What is your verdict, guilty or not guilty?'

'Guilty,' replied the fellows all together.

'Wery good; and your sentence, gen'lmen?'

'A jolly good 'iding,' was the reply (again unanimous).

'A jolly good 'iding, eh? That means three dozen with a dog-whip or a hash-stick, for want of a cat-o'-nine-tails. A wery lenient sentence, gen'lmen, and I will see that it is dooly carried hout. Before doin' so, three on you just escort these three lads as prisoners up to the Court. Ring the back-door bell, and ask for Mr. Bompas, the butler, when they come to open the door.'

'Here, Mr. Reginald, Mr. Charles, don't leave me here all alone with this beast, for Gawd's sake! he'll be the death of me else,' I cried; and the boys in reply tried all they could to struggle free, but their captors were too strong, and they were duly marched off, protesting. As soon as they were out of sight, the brute Mallard, turning to a stalwart under-keeper, said to him: 'Joe Kiff, this here honourable court appints you bo'sun's mate for the occasion. I calls upon you accordin' to do your dooty, and give this prisoner, caught in the hact of night poaching, three dozen lashes with this here dog-whip; and lay it on thick, d'ye hear?'

In vain I protested and threatened and kicked and struggled. The fellows, delighted in the job, apparently, threw me down, and Joe Kiff, a robust young fellow, with the strength of a Hercules, taking me by the scruff of the neck, like he would an offending retriever, proceeded to pitch into me with the dog-whip until I was

half mad with pain, accompanying each lash with such remarks as ''Ware Chase, will yer! Come to heel, will yer! Down charge, will yer!' just as if he was addressing a dog of some kind. When he let go of me I was as mad as a bull, and quite as dangerous, as you may imagine, though, of course, quite unable to do anything. I could only use my tongue, which I did to some tune.

'Ah, you're feverish, my man,' coolly observed Mallard, quite ignoring my language; a little solitary confinement in the fresh hair is what you want, I can see. Tie him up, Joe, to this here hoak tree, and leave him there till daybreak, and then you can come and let him loose.' And, if you'll believe me, gentlemen, that's just what they did, and there I was left until six o'clock the next morning, when the keepers came and released me, more dead than alive. Of course I complained to the Colonel, and all the change I got from him was that it served me right for going. I sent a challenge by one of the footmen to Mallard, who said in reply that he would fight me for a fi'pun note any day I liked to appoint. He had, of course, heard nothing about the duello, and would not understand that gentlemen never have recourse to anything so low as fists when they settle their affairs of honour. So it came to nothing.

We managed to pay him off, though, to some extent. Under pretence of wishing him to drink their good healths, the day before they returned to school, the three young gents went down to Mallard's cottage, carrying with them a bottle of port wine for that purpose. Just as port wine is doctored for the English market, so, gentlemen, was this particular bottle doctored—with an infusion of jalap—for Mr. Mallard.

Mr. Mallard, being partial to port wine, drank the lot at a sitting, with the result, gentlemen, that not a great while afterwards the PIG became extremely uncomfortable, not to say ill, and was obliged to retire to his sty, where he had to remain all the following day. It took him, in fact, quite as long to shake off the effects of the port as it did me to shake off the aches and pains acquired on that terrible night. I was amply revenged, gentlemen—amply revenged.

THE BITER BIT

THE SPORTING GENTLEMAN'S STORY

One of the most regular of its members in his attendance at the nightly reunions of the Horse-shoe Club was a certain Mr. Joseph Sharpe, a middle-aged, prosperous-looking person, whose clothes and general get-up, without being flashy, were decidedly of a sporting cut. He was somewhat broadly described as a 'sporting gentleman.' Now, I need scarcely say that between the sportsman and the sporting gentleman there is a very great deal of difference, and it is very certain that the former title would be totally inapplicable as far as Mr. Sharpe individually was concerned. In all human probability he never fired off a gun, went out hunting, or fished a trout stream in his life, and you might bet with safety that he never will; but, on the other hand, the horse races, the prize fights, the trotting matches, the badger baitings, the games of billiards, skittles and dominoes he has assisted at at various times are innumerable; consequently, if (as I am informed it is) to be an authority on the amusements in question is a necessary qualification for the sporting gentleman

or gent, why, it is very certain that Mr. Joseph Sharpe had every right to the appellation. Profession he had none, unless making a small book on the principal events of the year and doing a few commissions constituted one.

It was whilst acting in the latter capacity that the incident occurred which I heard him (he being called on by the chairman for a story) relate to the club one evening. Having tenaciously treasured up the same in my memory, I now retail it for the benefit of my readers:

To look at me now, gentlemen, said Mr. Joseph Sharpe, glancing complacently as he spoke at the large diamond ring that sparkled on the little finger of his right hand—to look at me now, you would perhaps hardly believe that at one period of my career—and not such a great while ago, either—I was absolutely and completely broke—ruined, gentlemen, I was, indeed, stock, lock, and barrel, as the saying is. I really don't believe, as I walked dejectedly down the Strand on the Monday after the Cambridgeshire of 18—, there was a more impecunious person in the streets of London than yours truly, Joseph Sharpe. I'll tell you how it was: Hitherto I had confined myself to backing horses in a small way, and I am bound to say with astonishing good luck so far. I won a good bit on the Derby that year, did equally well at Ascot, and did not fare badly at Goodwood. Just after that, my father dying and leaving me what he had, poor old chap!—not much, certainly, but still a comfortable little sum, for all that—I found myself with more money at my disposal than

I ever thought possible. In fact, what with my legacy and the money I had made going racing, I had quite a tidy little amount standing to my credit at the bank.

The question I next had to decide was what to do with it. One or two of my father's old friends got at me, and tried to induce me to cut the sporting and take to a more respectable mode of earning a living. There was old Chucksby, for instance, said to me in his bluff, hearty way one day:

'I say, Joe, my boy,' says he, 'why don't you go in for *my* line of business (he was a draper, gentlemen)? It's a very paying one for an enterprising young man, as you must be well aware. Look at *me!* I don't look very 'ard up, do I?' And then, as if a sudden thought occurred to him, he added: 'Hang it all! Look 'ere, Joseph: I was a very old pal o' your poor dear old dad, and I should like to do his son a turn *oncommon*, that I should, so I tell you what I'll do with you: invest your money along with me, and you shall have a share in my business, blow me if you shan't!'

I told him I would think it over and let him know, and it was lucky on the whole that I exercised such discretion, for the good, kind old man went through the court in less than a month afterwards, his affairs, it came out, having been hopelessly involved for some time past. So it ended in my turning a deaf ear to all my advisers and turning bookmaker. And it was after my first experiment in that line that I found myself in the predicament I told you about. Happening to hear (on the very best authority, of course) that Coriolanus was what is commonly called a stiff un—'as good as dead,' my informant told me—for the Cambridgeshire,

I took liberties with him accordingly—laid against him, in fact, as long as I could find anyone to back him. The brute won in a canter, and I was broke—clean broke. When I had paid my losses on the Monday, I give you my word, gentlemen, that I hadn't ten pounds in the world to call my own. Of course, I need not have stumped up a shilling had I been so minded, and I might say I was sorely tempted once or twice to let everything slide, and leave my creditors in the lurch; but somehow or other I thought better of it, and I paid up every penny that I owed on settling day. As it turned out, the old saying, 'Honesty is the best policy,' turned out quite true in my particular case.

Having settled up, I was walking (as I have, I think, told you, gentlemen) down the Strand, with nine pounds fourteen shillings and sevenpence, my sole remaining capital, in my pocket, and feeling that low—well, I really can't describe it, gentlemen. I can only say that I hope none of you in this room have ever experienced sensations of a similar kind;* for if you have, all I can say is, I thoroughly sympathize with you—when who should I run up against just as I was passing Catherine Street but Mr. James Robson, a well-known North Country bookmaker, and an old acquaintance of mine. Not feeling at all inclined just then to parley with anyone, I just nodded politely a 'How are you?' and was about to pass on, when I found my progress barred effectively by my bookmaking friend, who,

* Note by the Author.—One or two of the members, I noticed, wriggled slightly in their chairs at this remark of Mr. Sharpe's, as if they had not been altogether strangers to embarrassments of a pecuniary nature at some period of their careers.

evidently determined not to let me go without a word, now interposed his burly person, and, taking me by the buttonhole, fairly brought me to an anchor, much against my will.

'You're the very chap as I wanted to see, lad, so it's a fortunate meeting, this,' said Mr. Robson. 'You've had a bad settling, I fear,' added he—'in fact, I know ye have; for haven't I got some of it here in my pocket?' pointing significantly as he spoke to the left side of his broad chest, a certain bulging out in his great-coat just about that region denoting pretty plainly that there was a well-filled note-case hidden away in the inside pocket. 'After losing o' one's money,' he went on, 'there's nothing, in my opinion, like a good dinner and a bottle or two o' champagne, so ye can't do better, my boy, than coom and have some o' both along o' me. I particklarly want to talk to ye, too; so say, lad, will ye coom?'

I accepted the invitation, much to Mr. Robson's satisfaction; not that I looked forward very much to his company, but it struck me that the man might be of use to me hereafter, and I was also curious to know what he was so anxious to see me about. 'Some robbery, I'll go bail,' thought I.

Accordingly, taking my arm between his, as if determined not to lose sight of me, Mr. Robson and I wended our way to a certain snug dining-place in the Strand, much patronized by racing men, and famed for the excellence of its mutton, in one of whose snug boxes we quickly found ourselves seated at a repast ordered on a most liberal scale by my host of the evening.

'Now for it!' said I to myself, as, dinner being cleared away and the cloth drawn, my host ordered some punch (another speciality of the house) and cigars, and put his legs up on the seat with the air of a man who has dined very much to his satisfaction.

Mr. R. being, as he took occasion to tell me previous to beginning dinner, a man who did not believe 'in doin' moor than one thing at a time, lad,' had hardly opened his mouth during the meal except to put food into it, or to express an opinion, in his usual straightforward, if somewhat uncultured style, that such and such a dish was 'domd' good or 'domd' bad, as the case might be.

It was not until my entertainer had got a cigar under way (the largest in the place, you may depend), and had ladled out and drank a couple of glasses of punch, that he condescended to abandon his recumbent position and talk business. His first act was to rest his arms on the table and lean forward until his great ponderous head nearly touched mine; this done, he, in a sort of hoarse growl, proceeded to pour his scheme into my all-attentive ears.

Before I tell you what it was, though, gentlemen, I must, by your leave, go back a bit. Preliminaries had just been settled for a great prize-fight for a thousand a side and the championship of England, to come off in three months' time or thereabouts, between the redoubtable Tom Ball (the then holder of the belt) and Jack Roxby, otherwise the 'Bold Sailor Boy.' The contest, as I well knew, promised to be one of unusual interest, and it is very certain that for a long period past no battle in the prize-

ring had caused such excitement amongst the general as well as the sporting public as this one now on the tapis. In the first place, Tom Ball was a well-tried veteran, who scarcely knew what defeat meant, and as game a man as ever threw his hat into the ring. He had now been comparatively idle for nearly two years, nobody, apparently, caring to 'take him on,' as the saying is; in fact, it really looked as if he would be allowed to retire from the ring (as he announced he would shortly) without having again to defend the belt. However, this was not to be, for suddenly, what was thought by the 'cognoscenti' to be a gem of the first water, made his appearance in the pugilistic world. This was Jack Roxby, a fine, strapping young fellow of five-and-twenty, who, though a complete novice, had lately defeated in the easiest possible manner that accomplished boxer, Bill Snaggs, better known by his sobriquet of 'Bermondsey Bill.' So decisive was the result, and so well did the young un shape, that his delighted backers, in the first flush of victory, announced their intention of at once matching him against the champion. Meanwhile, however, Bill Snaggs, laying his recent defeat to want of condition (he having underrated his man, he said, and taken things too easy in consequence), expressed himself as dissatisfied and anxious for another shy. Accordingly, a fresh match was made for two hundred a side, to take place in two months from that time. The fight duly came off, in the presence of an unwonted number of 'Corinthians,' all anxious to have a peep at the embryo champion of England. Nor were they disappointed in their expectations, for Jack Roxby beat 'Bermondsey Bill' this time more decisively than

before. The latter was in splendid condition and fought like a Trojan, but he never had a chance with his opponent at any moment of the fight, and poor Bill was forced to admit—when, out-fought at all points and knocked all to pieces, he reluctantly consented to his seconds 'throwing up the sponge'—that the 'best man' had won. No time was lost now in bringing Jack Roxby and Tom Ball together. Any amount of money was forthcoming for both men, so that the necessary preliminaries were gone through with scarcely any delay, and within a week articles were drawn up and signed, as I have already told you, for the pair to fight at a given date for the large sum of a thousand pounds a side, and the proud title of 'champion of England.' One would have thought that, taking into consideration his previous performances and long experience, Tom would have been a strong favourite, but it was not so. The betting started at two to one on Tom, but money quickly poured in to such an extent for the 'Bold Sailor Boy' that in a very short time the odds veered round the other way. The public no doubt relied on his youth, and also his wonderful form in his recent fight with 'Bermondsey Bill.' All manner of stories were in circulation, too, about him. He was a nobleman in disguise; he had been at the University, and having been rusticated, had quarrelled with his father, and had in consequence first enlisted in the Blues, and then taken to the P.R. Pretty little Mrs. Coverdale went about telling everybody that her brother Frank said he distinctly remembered being up with him at Oxford. (This was singular, rather, for Lady Loosefish's fond and rather vapid hubby remembered him quite well at

Trinity, when he was at Cambridge.) Being very good-looking, too, besides being possessed of a magnificent physique, his photographs sold like wildfire, especially amongst the ladies, who all professed to have fallen in love with him—pretty souls! In short, he found himself firmly established as the lion of the hour. In reality, Jack's history was a very short one and not particularly romantic. Born of highly respectable parents, he being somewhat of a roving disposition when a lad, and not relishing the idea of the seat on a three-legged stool in the same office as his father which was in store for him, just took himself off one fine night and volunteered for the Royal Navy. He quickly found that his self-chosen profession suited him down to the ground, and by the time he had grown up to man's estate there was no smarter seaman in the whole of Her Majesty's fleet than John Roxby, A.B., of H.M.S. *Sultana*. The second lieutenant happening to be a great patron of the noble art of self-defence, and very fond of boxing, made Jack put on his gloves with him one fine day for a friendly bout. The sailor took to the amusement with the same facility that a duck does to water, so much so that his mentor very quickly came to the conclusion that his pupil was made of no ordinary stuff.

A rough-up with a professional pugilist at Portsmouth by way of a trial, in the course of which Jack knocked the professor's head through the window, dispelled any further doubt on the subject, and the lieutenant forthwith determined to turn his knowledge to account. Jack, though fond of the navy, and loath to leave it in a way, yet could not resist the tempting

proposals set before him by his patron, the lieutenant, and a chance observation of that gallant officer—namely, that with ordinary luck he was bound in time to occupy the coveted position of champion of England—settled the business. He put himself unreservedly into the hands of his patron, who lost no time in buying his pupil's discharge from the navy.

The next thing to do was to look for a 'customer,' to put the coming champion through his facings and let his patron and his friends see what he could do with a good man before him in a 24-foot ring. He was quickly found in the pugilist whose head Jack had knocked through the window at Portsmouth, and who had not yet forgiven the indignity. A match was therefore very quickly ratified between the two for a small stake, and in the presence of a select company, composed chiefly of the naval and military element, the fight duly came off, with the result that Lieutenant Thornhill's 'novice'—as Jack was called—won, though not without receiving some heavy punishment from his antagonist, and which his patron was pleased to see he took with unflinching pluck.

And now, gentlemen, having given you a rough sketch of Jack Roxby and his antecedents, I will hark back to my North Country friend, Mr. James Robson, and his proposal.

It was briefly this: The betting, as he justly observed, was extremely heavy on the fight, and became more so every day, and there was no doubt at all about it that there was a great deal of money to be made 'if one only knew for certain, lad.'

'Now, my idea,' said that gentleman, 'is that this

Jack 'll weer t' owd mon out and lick 'im, for they tell me that he's the primest fighter we've seen for mony a day, and he's shewer to beat Tom at wrastlin' as well. Anyhow, he's favourite now, and likely to remain so.'

To be brief, then, the bookmaker, having first pledged me to secrecy, suggested that I should go down immediately to Portsmouth to interview Jack Roxby before he commenced to train, and should propose to him to square the fight in this way—viz., that just before the men shook hands in the ring, he was to take a small dose of a drug provided by Mr. Robson, which drug was warranted not to act on the taker for twenty minutes, at the expiration of which time it would begin to take effect, the taker would begin to turn giddy and reel, and his opponent would then 'go in and win' without causing any suspicion amongst the spectators. The terms he authorized me to offer to the 'Bold Sailor Boy,' if he agreed to the proposal, were three thousand pounds in cash, half immediately, the remainder to be handed to him before stepping into the ring, after he had been seen to take a specified dose. Finally, Mr. Robson's name was to be left entirely out of the transaction—not to be mentioned, in fact ('Oh, you cunning old rascal!' I thought to myself)—and if I settled everything satisfactory and comfortable-like, as he expressed it, I was to receive the sum of five hundred pounds for my service, the said sum to be paid in advance. 'And,' wound up my tempter, with almost brutal candour, 'if ye'll tak mar advice, lad, ye'll shak honds on the bargain, for ar know thou art as nigh broak as a chap can be in this woorld—baint thee, now?'

Well, gentlemen, as you may possibly imagine, this

audacious proposal fairly took away my breath for a moment. An immediate answer was impossible, and I begged for five minutes' grace to think it over.

'Ten, if you loike, lad,' responded Mr. Robson, with great affability; 'I know what t' answer 'll be, right enough.'

So saying, he ordered another brew of punch, lit another leviathan cigar, and cocked his legs up on the seat with every appearance of being well satisfied with himself, as no doubt he was. The worst part of it was that what he had said about my pecuniary state was true to the letter. There was no getting away from the fact that I was 'broak,' as he termed it; had it been otherwise with me, I should have scorned his infamous proposition with indignation. After thinking the matter over, however, I could come to no other conclusion (though sorely against my will, I do assure you, gentlemen) than that I should be acting unfairly to myself if I did not accept the bookmaker's offer. 'After all,' I said to myself by way of an excuse, 'I am only a paid agent in the matter. I am not the real culprit.'

So, as the wily old bookmaker had sagaciously predicted, at the end of the ten minutes my answer was 'Yes,' and we accordingly shook hands on the bargain over a fresh brew of punch. It was arranged between us before we parted that I should start for Portsmouth the very next morning, for which purpose my partner, who was evidently in a liberal mood, handed me a twenty-pound note, 'for expenses loike,' as he said.

The next morning I started on my mission. On reaching my destination, my first act was to inquire

of one of the numerous cabmen plying at the station if he knew the whereabouts of the redoubtable Jack Roxby.

'Is it the "Bould Sailor Boy" h'what yer honour manes?' shouted Jehu in reply, jumping down from his box in great excitement. 'Shure, it's meself that knows um entirely. Jump in, yer honour, an' I'll take yer to um at wonst. Shure, and I'm the bhoy as allus drives Mister Roxby and the Liftinant when they goes anywhere for a little divarsion.'

There was no resisting this appeal, so in I bundled, and away we rattled at as good a pace as the wretched Rosinante between the shafts could raise at short notice. As we drove along, my driver alternately flogged the old horse and leaned over to indulge in eulogistic remarks on the hero I was on my way to visit. All of a sudden, looking more knowing than ever, he drew my attention to an extremely pretty and modest-looking girl walking along the footpath towards us.

'His swateheart,' said he in a hoarse whisper, and slackening his pace almost to a walk. 'Is all well wid 'im?' he shouted, as the young woman passed, taking off his dirty white hat and giving it a flourish in her honour.

She looked up, and nodded smilingly in assent.

'Ah, an' it's yerself is the rale beauty! Isn't she, sorr?' exclaimed my Irish friend, evidently well pleased at the recognition.

Another minute and we pulled up at a decent-looking public-house, rejoicing in the name of the Lord Nelson.

'Could I see Mr. Roxby?' I inquired of the landlord at the bar.

Well, the landlord didn't know, but he'd go and see. Mr. Roxby was just having a rub down after a walk, and he didn't usually receive visitors until after he'd had his dinner. Would I mention my name?

'Oh, Mr. Roxby won't know it if you do,' said I hastily. 'Kindly say a gentleman from London wishes to see him on very important business, and if he cannot grant me an interview now, perhaps he will be good enough to make an appointment later on in the day or to-morrow.'

'Ah, it'll be to-day, if he sees you at all,' replied Boniface, 'for he goes into active training to-morrow. Goin' to Noomarket, so I understand, worse luck! I wish he was a-goin' to remain where he is, I can tell you, for the customers he brings to my shop is somethin' extrahordinary. Bless yer 'art, why I've known people come 'ere and stand in the bar for hours (come from a distance, too) just to have a peep at 'im, and go away as happy as cock-robins if they do; and if they should chance to miss 'im, blowed if they don't come again the wery next day. There's a lot of perseverance about, ain't there? Well, I'll take up yer message, though I don't think it is much use, let me tell you.'

In a couple of minutes, however, down he came with the welcome news that the great man would see me at once.

'You're to walk up,' said the landlord of the Lord Nelson. 'The third door on the right-hand side when you get up to the top of the stairs, and there you'll find him; and,' he whispered in my ear as I proceeded

to climb the staircase, 'get him, if yer can, to show yer his harm afore you go. You'll say you never saw such a harm in all yer born days! I never did, for certain!'

'Come in!' said a manly voice, when, in obedience to the landlord's instructions, I knocked at the specified door; and entering accordingly, I found myself in the presence of the future champion of England. At first I thought I had made a mistake, for surely, thought I, this can't be a prize-fighter. Where was the bull neck, the flattened nose? Where the huge flapping ears and the sunken eyes I had always associated with members of the P.R.? Absent every one of them. Standing up and bidding me welcome was as good-looking a young fellow as ever I clapped eyes on. His limbs seemed to me absolutely perfect, combining as they did the strength of a Hercules and the grace of an Apollo; in fact, take him all in all, he was from head to foot as perfect a figure of a 'man' as one could wish to see. One thing is certain—one would never have guessed from either his face or his manner that he belonged to the bruising fraternity. Could I have foreseen with what sort of person I had to deal, it is very certain I should have required Mr. James Robson to do his dirty work himself. As it was I felt at considerable loss as to how to begin, I can tell you, gentlemen. What if he threw me out of the window, this superior young man? Oh, I tell you I was in a real quandary for once in my life. However, I had to get through it somehow, and, with a deal of stuttering and stammering on my part, get through it I did—taking precious good care, you may depend, to impress the 'Bold Sailor Boy'

with the fact that I was not the principal in the affair, only the paid agent.

Well, at last I finished (giving a gasp of relief as I did so), and paused for a reply.

The prize-fighter for some minutes was deep in thought. At length he spoke.

'I may as well,' he said, 'tell you, by way of a start, that my first impulse, when you mentioned the proposal you did, was to kick you out of the room, downstairs, and out of the house. ('Thank you for nothing,' thought I.) However, I thought I would let you go on, and hear all you'd got to say; and this is my reply to you or your principal—it doesn't matter to me which of you it is—one's as big a rascal as t'other, I reckon.'

Just imagine, gentlemen, my feelings at being addressed like this! *Me*, a man who from my youth up had always possessed a more than ordinary amount of gentlemanly feeling, and brought up so respectable, too, as I had been, to be called in so many words a rascal! By a common prize-fighter, too! Oh, I did feel hurt, I can assure you!

'I accept your terms ('Thank God for that,' thought I) on certain conditions, and I don't mind,' added he, with all the proverbial candour of the jolly Jack Tar, 'telling you why I accept them, and in a manner become as big, or nearly as big, a swindler as you and your pal. Excuse my speaking straight, won't you? it's a way I have. I learnt it in the navy, I fancy.'

'Oh, certainly,' I murmured, with as pleased an expression as I could put on, cursing his impudence

inwardly all the time, though. 'Oh, certainly; don't be afraid to speak.'

'No, I won't,' was the reply. 'I'm going,' continued he, 'to get married directly after my fight with Tom Ball for the belt; that's why I want the money, if you wish to know. The blunt will be useful, d'ye see, to my little woman, bless her heart! Dash it all!' exclaimed my hero, his face lighting up, 'when I think of my little Jenny, I feel as if I could do anything for her sake, short of murder.'

'And the conditions?' I ventured to ask.

'Oh, well, the conditions are these,' was the reply: 'I must know exactly what it is I am taking, and must have a certificate, signed by a medical man, that it is an absolute certainty that the drug will not take effect a second before the time you specify—twenty minutes, I think you said? And remember this, though I consent to sell my honour in this manner for a consideration, I shall do my level best to win the fight, all the same. And you mark my words, governor,' said Jack Roxby, rising from his chair and emphatically shaking his finger at me: 'I shall win, in spite of your hocussing, you see if I don't. I hope I shall, if only for the sake of putting you and your pal in the cart, and serve you jolly well right, I say.'

Well, gentlemen, after partaking of a bottle of champagne with the champion (and I may here mention that a little of it went a very long way), I took my leave, and started on my return journey to town, well pleased with the success of my mission. Mr. James Robson, I need scarcely say, was quite as gratified as I was, and not only duly kept his promise as regards my

honorarium—*dis*honorarium I think I might almost call it—but, judging from what I heard at the sporting clubs, lost no time in 'peppering' the 'Bold Sailor Boy' at every available opportunity. So much so that several other large operators, thinking there was 'something up,' followed suit and did likewise, with the result that before very long Tom Ball was reinstated in his old position as favourite for the great event. Now, my original intention was to let the fight 'run loose' as far as I was concerned—have nothing to do with it, in short, in a speculative sense. But somehow or other, for the life of me I couldn't get it out of my head, sleeping or waking, but that Jack Roxby would win. The idea got such a hold of me that I couldn't shake it off. It was a regular old man of the sea. At last, after a more feverish night than usual, I could stand it no longer. I went to the club I frequented, got hold of a friend (my credit, mind you, was first-rate), and bid him back the 'Sailor' for me for five hundred. (Fifteen hundred to five he took on my behalf.) The next day I waxed bolder still (I had had the nightmare again), and repeated the dose. Not only that, I took the odds myself in hundreds twice.

'What are you making a dom'd fule o' yourself for?' inquired Mr. Robson, who was standing by, and witnessed the transaction.

'Only a bit of a hedge,' replied I.

'Oh, that's the game, is it?' said he, with a laugh. 'Quite right, lad; a bet's niver much good until it's hedged.'

After that I drew in my horns, and waited anxiously for the day which was to make me a man or a mouse.

Twelve hundred pounds had I got on what looked a dead loser. I got quite thin, I can assure you. At length it came. Mr. Robson and I had sat up all the previous night, and as I got into the train in the small hours in the morning that was to take us to the scene of action, I felt more like a boiled owl than anything else. Well, out we all got somewhere in Kent; the ring was pitched in a convenient field adjacent to the line, the men pitched their castors into the ring, and, as soon as they had completed their toilets, the fight would begin.

I (still acting for the bookmaker) was in Jack Roxby's corner, and I slipped the stipulated money into his hands almost at the same moment that he took off the stipulated draught (with a friendly wink at me) that was to lose him the fight. A minute after 'Time' was called, and the men having shaken hands, the fight began.

Lord bless you! you never saw such a thing in your life. The 'Bold Sailor Boy' went for his man in such a murderous style that I verily believe he almost paralyzed him from the very beginning. The punishment he gave him was something awful to witness, and the round finished by Tom Ball falling with the sailor atop of him amid such a hubbub as I never heard, and above it all I could hear Mr. Robson's stentorian voice bellowing forth his desire to back the champion (for he didn't believe, you see, in Jack doing the trick in the twenty minutes). Well, there is not much more to tell. Tom Ball came up for Round No. 2 as game as a pebble, but looking as serious as—I really can't give it a name, gentlemen; I never saw anyone look so serious—there!

It did not much matter, though, how he looked, for they had not been at it more than three minutes, hammer and tongs, before the 'Bold Sailor Boy,' taking advantage of a good opening, caught poor old Tom such a blow in the throat as felled him to the ground insensible. 'Time!' Lord bless you! you might as well have shouted to a brick wall as poor Tom Ball. The fight was all knocked out of him for some time to come, I can tell you.

Of course the referee awarded the battle to Jack Roxby, and you should have seen his delight when all doubt on the subject was at rest, and he knew for certain he was champion of England in real downright earnest. He jumped clean over the ropes in his joy, and hugged his seconds round the neck to that extent that I thought he'd throttle them outright. As for me, I did not dare face my patron, so made the best of my way across country to the nearest town, and got back to town by a later train.

How did Mr. James Robson take it? Well, not over well, as you may imagine. That unlucky (or shall I say lucky) blow of Jack's that knocked Tom Ball out of time cost him upwards of fifteen thousand pounds —possibly more—and so disgusted him with the 'noble art,' that (to use his own words) he determined for the future 'to have nowt more to do wi proize-foightin', lad.'

JUST IN TIME

THE STATIONMASTER'S STORY

'It has just occurred to me,' observed our host and chairman one night, 'that though he has kindly favoured us with a song—and a very good song, too—whenever it has come round to his turn to contribute to our amusement, our much respected and popular stationmaster, Mr. John Strong, has never obliged with a story. Gentlemen, you, I know, are all well aware of the fact that our worthy friend has been associated with the Great Smashem and Crumplemup Railway going on for a goodish long while, but you possibly don't know that only this very day he completed his fortieth year of service with the company, who, I am sure you will all be pleased to hear, marked their approval of his conduct whilst in their employ by presenting him with a very handsome testimonial in the shape of a gold watch and chain.

'Now, gentlemen, it is odd to me—and I fancy to you, too—if during these forty years some incident worth the relating has not come under our old friend's notice; therefore, gentlemen, with your approval, I

beg to call on Mr. John Strong for a story, if he's got one about him, and in the meanwhile I call upon you to fill your glasses and drink to his jolly good health.'

Terrific applause followed this speech, the station-master being evidently a very popular character, and a general filling up of glasses was taking place when up jumped Mr. Binks, the dashing young linen-draper in the High Street, who occupied the post of vice-chairman that evening, with:

'Mr. Chairman and Gents, with your kind permission, I should like to add an amendment to the toast just mentioned, which is, that it should be drunk with musical honours, and, if you'll allow me, I will lead the chorus.'

And suiting the action to the word, the sporting Binks burst forth with the time-honoured bacchanalian chorus, 'For he's a jolly good fellow,' in which he was promptly joined by the full strength of the company.

When the hubbub and noise had ceased, the station-master, a fine stalwart man, carrying his sixty years remarkably well, rose from his seat, and thanking the company in a few modest words for the honour they had done him, wound up by saying that our host was quite correct in surmising as he had. During his service with the company a somewhat remarkable event had occurred, 'the particulars of which, gentlemen,' said John Strong, as he resumed his chair, 'I shall be pleased to relate to you, if you care to hear them;' and the stationmaster, taking as signs of approval the renewed clattering of glasses and fists on the table, commenced, without more ado, the following story:

I don't know whether any of the present company have ever known what it is to number amongst the members of your family a young man—a son, say, or a brother or nephew—who, with a natural disinclination to honest work of any sort, is no good to himself nor anyone about him—the class of young man, in short, that is usually termed a scamp.

A sort of subdued growl going up in response led to the supposition that such a luxury was not altogether unknown to some of the members of the Club.

Because, I'm sorry to say, that some years ago I had just such a one as I have described tacked on to my tail. Ah, gentlemen, when on her death-bed my poor widowed sister left me, by way of a legacy, her only child, and begged me with almost her last breath to take care of little George after she had gone, I had no idea, I can assure you, of what a 'benefit' I was letting myself in for. However, there it was, and it could not be helped. My poor sister died quite happy, poor dear! now that she knew that there was a home provided for her little one. After I had seen to everything, true to my promise, I brought the little lad back home along with me, and my wife took to him, it is no exaggeration to say, quite as if he was one of her own. We had no boys of our own as it happened, nothing but girls, so, perhaps, that was one reason why little George was the more welcome, for my wife had sadly wanted a boy, and so had I for that matter. I was a guard then in the company's service, and lived at Sleaford, in a little row of houses called Alma Cottages, close to the station, so as to be handy to my work.

Well, gentlemen, time went on, and before I could

scarcely believe it, little George, who I had brought home with me a little curly-headed fellow just able to talk, was now getting on to be quite a young man. Of course, my duties taking me away as they did all day, I was not able to look after my charge myself, and was obliged to leave everything to my wife in that respect. I was away from five in the morning until half-past twelve, when I had a couple of hours for my dinner and a sleep; after that I was on duty again until nine at night, and when I did come home, you may depend that after I had had my supper it was not very long before I turned into bed, for by that time I used to feel pretty well fagged out. Meanwhile, George went to school, and being a bright, sharp lad, got on very rapidly; and being well-behaved as well, I really thought he would turn out a credit to us both, especially when prizes and certificates for exemplary conduct kept tumbling in as they did at the end of every term. Oh, we were quite proud of our nephew, my wife and me, I can tell you, gentlemen.

At last the time came for him to leave school, and turn his attention to the more serious business of life, and, by way of a beginning, I was lucky enough to get him into the booking-office at our station at a salary of fourteen shillings a week to begin with. He was only sixteen, so I thought with reason that he was a lucky chap to commence life so well. When I came back to dinner that Saturday afternoon, and told them at home, they were all as pleased as I was, George especially.

'Hurrah!' says he. 'Now, uncle, I shall be able to

repay you and aunt for some of your kindness to me all these years.'

'Say nothing about that, my lad,' replied I (though I was pleased all the same); 'only behave yourself, work hard, and be a credit to us, and that's all we want—isn't it, missis?' appealing to my wife.

'Indeed it is,' she replied. 'We're all pleased to have him here. George knows that well enough, and I'm sure the dear boy will be all we wish and more, won't you, George?'

'Of course he will, mother,' blurted out Sophy, our eldest girl, always George's champion, if ever he wanted one, blushing like a peony as she spoke.

We had a little something extra for supper that Saturday evening, I remember, and it was a happy party sat down to it, I can tell you, gentlemen. As I sat and smoked my pipe afterwards by the fireside with my dear wife's hand in mine, gazing at my three girls and George, all laughing and chatting merrily round us, I felt that contented—well, words can't express how contented I felt. 'If it's always going to be like this,' I thought to myself, 'life will indeed be worth having.' Well, George began his new employment on the Monday, and for a while everything went as smooth as smooth could be. He liked the work (he always was quick at figures), and gave satisfaction to those above him. 'If he only keeps steady, Mr. Strong,' said the head booking-clerk to me one day, 'your nephew will do well in the world, for a nicer, better-behaved lad I never had under me.' So pleased was I with that remark of the head clerk's, that before going home to my dinner that day I made a round of it into the town and bought a silver watch

for George, as an encouragement for him to go on in the way he was doing, and to show him how pleased I was with his conduct. Well, gentlemen, time went on; George had been now a little over a year in the booking-office, his screw had been raised, and he was, I believed (having heard nothing to the contrary), going on as well as ever. He was now just eighteen, and a good-looking, smart young fellow as ever you saw, and good-hearted as well, always thinking of his aunt and cousins and me, he was, and bringing us little presents, more especially to Sophy, to whom he was now regularly engaged, to her mother's and my great delight. I thought nothing of those presents at the time, knowing as I did that, living at home with us for nothing, he had plenty of money; but my wife made a remark about it one night when we were by ourselves, and said she hoped George wasn't going too fast. 'I don't like that sporting paper the dear lad's always got in his pocket, John,' said she, 'and he smokes much more than is good for him, I fancy. I only hope he's not getting into extravagant habits.' I was sleepy at the time, and rather pooh-poohed the missis I remember, and the next day, bless you, I had forgotten all about it. However, I was to be disagreeably reminded of her words, as it happened, for two days afterwards, Mr. Ablett, the head clerk (the same who had spoke about George before, and said how well he liked him), meeting me on the platform just as I was leaving the train to go off to my dinner, hailed me, and asked me to step on one side for a moment, as he had something to say to me.

'I want to say a word to you about your nephew, John,' says he to me; 'I know you won't like it, but I

can't help that; it must be said. The long and short of it is, John, he ain't going on as he should do. He's fallen into bad company, and got into bad ways, and if he isn't stopped from going on as he is at present he'll go to the bad, John Strong, that's what he'll do. Now, I like the lad,' he continued, 'and I don't want to see him come to harm, when a word in season might set him straight, so I determined to let you know at once before things got worse.'

And thus, gentlemen, it all came out, and I give you my word, what I heard nearly broke my heart. It appeared that he had formed an acquaintance with a lazy, dissolute scamp, named Sam Crook, a fellow who had formerly been a clerk in the telegraph department at the station, and been discharged from there for communicating the contents of private telegrams, having reference to racing results, to others than those whom they were addressed to. Since that he had lived by his wits—as it is called—another word, in my humble opinion, for general dishonesty. 'Give a dog a bad name,' they say, 'and hang him.' I can only say that, according to that, Sam Crook should have been hung long ago, for a man with a worse character than he bore wasn't in the town, as I very well knew; consequently, when I heard that not only was he constantly loafing about the station and talking to my boy whenever he got a chance, but the pair were continually together of a night, playing bagatelle and cards at a low public-house, called the Wheel of Fortune, kept by an ex-pugilist and betting man, and the resort of all the low characters in the place, you may imagine how I trembled for poor George. Not

only that, there was poor Sophy to think about. Why, I would sooner have seen her in her grave, dearly as I loved her, than she should be mated to a man of the same description as this Crook; and so fond of George as she was too!

'It's a blow to you, I can see,' said Mr. Ablett, 'but it's best that you should know. These trials have to be borne, you know; and besides,' he added kindly, '"a stitch in time saves nine." You know the old saying, eh, John? So cheer up, and don't take what I've told you too much to heart all at once. Reason with the lad, John, quietly, and you'll get him to keep in the right road yet.' And so saying, Mr. Ablett shook hands, and went back to his office.

Well, I went home to dinner, but I had no appetite, and, making the excuse to my wife and Sophy that I had got a bit of a headache, I lit my pipe and went out for a stroll. You may depend I did not let out the real state of the case to either of them. As luck would have it, I hadn't gone very far before who should I run across but Mr. Clutchit, our Superintendent of Police. 'Hallo, John!' says he; 'why, what's up along with you? By the looks of you, I should say your dinner hadn't agreed with you.'

Now, I knew Mr. Clutchit well, and as he was a man I had a very great respect for and every confidence in, I up and told him what was the matter with me. 'I've known it, John, this long time,' he replied, 'and have been sorry to know it, too, for your sake and all your sakes, and I can assure you this: that I've had it on the tip of my tongue, more than once, to tell you what I have seen going on for some time past. One thing is

certain: that if Mr. Ablett hadn't told you, I must have before long, for I should, as a friend, have considered it my duty so to do. Now, look here, old friend, seeing's believing, isn't it? Well, there's a Derby sweep on at the Wheel of Fortune, and the draw takes place this very night. When you leave your train, John, instead of going home, just you slip down there quietly and judge for yourself. It'll shame the lad, if there's any shame in him, as I fancy there is, and you can then take him home along with you and give him a good talking to. Maybe I'll be there or thereabouts myself; I can't say for certain, though, just at the present moment. Anyhow, I shall give orders to one of my men to be pretty handy about nine o'clock, so that if there should be a row, you've got nothing to do but blow that railway whistle of yours, and you'll have someone at your elbow before you can say Jack Robinson. I should advise you, though, to keep your temper well in hand, for it don't do no good kicking up a shindy in a low den like the Wheel of Fortune if it's possible to avoid it. There are some chaps go there, bless you, who, if they did get you down, wouldn't be at all particular about using your head for a football if they got half a chance, I can assure you'—with which friendly counsel Inspector Clutchit bade me good afternoon, and proceeded on his way, and I made tracks for the station to attend to my duties. The inspector's advice was sound, I thought, and I determined to take it. 'Yes,' thought I, as I jumped into my van, 'I'll pay a visit to the Wheel of Fortune this very night, and judge for myself. It can do no harm, and may do a great deal of good.'

Accordingly, when I landed back at Sleaford Station at 8.45 that night, as soon as ever I had seen to my parcels and way bills, I sent off a note by a porter who lived down our way to my wife, saying that I shouldn't be back until ten o'clock, perhaps later, having business to see to in the town; and having taken a glass of ale and a bite of something in the refreshment department, I lit a pipe and walked down through the town to the Wheel of Fortune. The public-house in question was a low, dirty-looking house, situated in a back-street—quite in the slums, in fact—and thinks I to myself as I looked at it from across the road, if the inside of the house is anything similar to the outside, it must indeed be a nice place. I felt quite shy of entering the den, I do assure you, gentlemen; not that I was afraid, you understand, but I felt as if I was losing my respectability by so doing. However, repeating the old saying to myself, 'In for a penny in for a pound,' I was just about to walk across the road, when a voice behind me calling out my name brought me to a sudden standstill, and turning round I confronted a policeman who had suddenly emerged from some dark corner.

'Hold hard a minute, Mr. Strong,' said he; 'Inspector Clutchit sent me to tell you not to go in yonder until he came, which 'll be, I reckon, in about ten minutes or a quarter of an hour from now. There's a rare nice lot in the old Wheel of Fortune to-night, Mr. Strong, and one in pertickler who answers very well to the description of a chap as is wanted by the London police for burglary and attempted murder, and the guv'nor hopes to lay hold of him if, as we fancy, it is the man as is wanted. There's likely enough to be a bit of a scrim-

mage,' added the policeman; 'it's a'most a pity you haven't got a bit of timber along with you, Mr. Strong.'

'Oh, never mind about me,' says I in chaff; 'they'll find me *Strong* enough, I fancy, if I am called upon to defend myself.'

'Well, I hope you won't be,' was the reply; 'there's nothing like being prepared, though.' A second after he added, 'I fancy I can see the inspector a-coming along; if you don't mind, Mr. Strong, we'll just go forward and meet him in case anyone from over the way catches sight of us. We don't want the London "sparrer" we are in search of to fly away afore we can put some salt on his tail, if we can help it. There's fifty pounds reward, too, offered for his capture, so my gentleman 'll be worth the catching if we do succeed in laying hold of him.

'Well, John, you've taken my advice, it seems,' said Inspector Clutchit, who now came up, accompanied by three plain-clothes men. 'A word in your ear,' he went on, taking me on one side and speaking in a hoarse whisper. 'There's a rare game on to-night at the Wheel of Fortune. I didn't know it when I met you this morning, or I am not sure that I should have advised you're coming. It's just this, my boy: there's one of the most desperate housebreakers in London in the crib to-night; I know it for certain, and what's more to the purpose, I mean to have him by hook or by crook. Now, I have been thinking that you can be of the very greatest service to us in this matter, if you don't mind. What say you: will you give us your help or not? I may as well say at once there is sure to be a row and probably an ugly one; so that if you don't

care to be mixed up in it, I should advise your going straight home at once. What's it to be? I'll see young George all right in either case, never fear.'

Well, gentlemen, to tell you the truth, I didn't much fancy being in this scrimmage, if scrimmage there was to be, for many reasons that you may well understand. There was my wife to consider for one, and my character and reputation with the railway company for another. Then, on the other hand, thinks I to myself, if any harm does come of it, the inspector is bound to see me through it all right, as it was entirely at his suggestion I am here. Not only that, I'm not above saying that I was rather anxious to see this party run in, and apart from the look of the thing, in my heart of hearts, I was not at all averse to a bit of a rough and tumble, for as a young man there was no one fonder of a turn with the boxing-gloves or at wrestling than I was, and being a stiff-built sort of chap, I could generally manage to hold my own with the best of 'em. So after a very short amount of consideration I turned round to Mr. Clutchit and told him he was welcome to any service I could render him in the matter, and there was my hand on it.

The inspector shook it warmly.

'You're a trump, John, that's what you are! a game-cock of the first water! I was certain you'd want to have a look in. Bless your heart, you needn't be afraid of the railway company saying anything; I'll square them. Now, I'll tell you what I propose to do. First of all,' said the inspector, taking hold of one of my coat buttons in one hand and tapping my chest with the forefinger of his other hand, by way of

emphasizing his words—'first of all, I want you to go into the house just like an ordinary customer come in to have a glass of old-and-bitter, look in at the sweep drawn, and put a quiet half-sovereign on Fly-by-Night for the Derby. That's what you've come in for. Wery good. You goes in, and the first thing you sees is your nephew in company with that confounded young vagabond of a Sam Crook. I shall have the darbies on *him* before long, you'll see. Good again! You remonstrate with your nephew for consorting with such a blackguard as Sam Crook, and urge him to come home at once. Sam cuts up rusty at being abused, and gives the rough edge of his tongue in turn. You lose your temper and very naturally knock him down. The company will take Sam's part, and go for you; you yell blue murder, and then I and my men come to the rescue. There will be a general rush to escape, and the boys will walk into the arms of a lot more of my constables, who have quietly formed a cordon round the house. There!' exclaimed Mr. Clutchit, giving me a hearty smack on the shoulder, and looking at me with an air of pride, as much as to say, Ain't I a clever boy?—'that's my plan, and if between us all we don't land our friend from London, why, you're one Dutchman and I'm another, and that's all about it.'

'Well, yes, I think that ought to do the trick, Mr. C.,' said I, moving as if to be off; 'I think the plan's a good one, and I'll lose no time in performing my part of it. By the way, you may as well tell me what sort of a looking chap this is that's wanted so badly; I might make sure of him, perhaps, for you before you turn up.'

'Ah, I forgot that,' said the inspector. 'It will be as well, as you say, and if you should happen to tackle him, John, before we come, why, half the reward of fifty pounds is yours, in course. There's his photograph,' says he, pulling a carte de visite out of his pocket and taking me under the street lamp so that I could see it better. 'He's got reddish hair, and has grown a moustache since this was done, and I believe he's wearing a catskin cap and a suit of clothes of a greenish plaid pattern.'

Well, gentlemen, there being nothing more to be said, I once more made tracks for the Wheel of Fortune, and, having arrived there in due course, I pushed open the swing doors and marched boldly in. There weren't a great many in the bar—just one or two cattle-drovers and such like—what there were, though, were of a pretty dingy sort, you can lay a wager.

'Is the draw over yet, miss?' I inquired of the flash-looking barmaid as I entered.

'No, it ain't; it hasn't long begun,' was the reply; 'you'll find 'em busy at it upstairs in the club-room if you'll step up.'

Accordingly, up a very rickety, evil-smelling staircase I stepped, and on the first landing found the apartment in question, and, the door being open, I stepped in and joined the company there assembled. And such a company as it was! I don't think I ever did see such a low lot of blackguards as were seated on Windsor chairs at the long table that ran all down the room. At the end sat a big bloated-looking ruffian, whom it did not need much telling was the landlord, the ex-prize-fighter, his scarred face and broken nose

telling their own tale. The draw was evidently just over, and the company were now busily engaged in betting on the Derby, the landlord—betting-book in hand—having apparently as much as he could do, judging by the numerous bets he kept jotting down. Just as I entered the room a fresh young voice from the far end of the room shouted out: 'Now then, Joe, when are you going to attend to me? How much Shillelagh for the Derby?'

I could scarcely believe my ears, and I peered through the tobacco smoke so as to make sure. It was, as I thought, none other than young George. There he sat, sure enough, with a long pipe in his mouth and a glass of spirits-and-water before him, and at his side the scoundrel Mr. Ablett had warned me against, Sam Crook. My bile rose at the sight, I can tell you, gentlemen. I waited for more, though, before I said anything.

'Wot price Shillelagh? Oh, height to won to you, George!' shouted back Mr. Joe Daggs; ''ow much to?'

'A quid,' was my nephew's response; 'but I'm not going to take those odds, Joe, you cheating old vagabond! I won't take less than tens, so don't think it.'

'Well, I s'pose you must 'ave it, a good customer like you. Twenty pun to two, I'll lay yer if yer like.'

'All right; I'll take that,' shouted back George.

But my dander was up, and I could keep myself under control no longer.

'No, you won't, George!' shouted I, walking up the room, and taking the astonished youth by the shoulder. 'No you won't!' And snatching his betting book from



his hand, just as he was about to put the wager down, I threw it into the fire. 'And now you just come home with me directly,' said I to George, who by this time had turned very white, for he was fairly taken by surprise, so much so that he at once got on his legs, and would have no doubt followed me out without a word.

For a second the company generally did not speak, for it was plain they were as much astonished at my behaviour as George was. When, however, they saw him preparing to leave the room they quickly found their tongues, and all began to speak at once.

'"Ow about my bet?' shouted Daggs.

'Strike it off your book. You've got no business to bet with a boy like that, and you ought to be ashamed of yourself!' I roared back. 'Come away, George.'

But Mr. Crook must needs interfere, and, getting between me and George, tried to hustle me, abusing me like a pickpocket the while. At this I fairly lost my temper, and letting out my right hand, I caught him well between the eyes, and sent him down as if he was shot. This was the signal for a general row.

They all rose to their feet at once, and a chair was thrown at me which I only just avoided. I saw who threw it—it was a man with a red moustache and a catskin cap. In a second I was across the room and had the ruffian by the throat. A momentary struggle, and over we toppled, me uppermost, with our hands at each other's throats. At that moment someone cried: 'Look out! here's the slops upon us!' and just as I heard a trampling of many feet on the wooden stairs outside, and thought to myself, 'Thank God! here's

the inspector at last!' I was struck a violent blow on the head with some blunt instrument. My grasp relaxed on my opponent's throat; a darkness came over my senses, and I remembered no more.

Well, gentlemen, when I came to myself and stared vacantly about me, I found myself comfortably established in bed in my own room, with my wife and children in attendance on me. My first inquiry of them was: Where was I? my next: How long had I been there?

You may judge of my astonishment when they told me just ten days. Then I tried to collect my scattered thoughts together, and after a bit the whole affair came back to me: the visit to the Wheel of Fortune, the row, the arrival of the police, and last, but not least, the crack on the head received from some person unknown.

I had been brought back insensible by the police, said my wife, and in that state I had been ever since. At first the doctor thought the skull was fractured, in which event my case would have been hopeless; but eventually it was found that it was only concussion of the brain, though a very severe one, and quite enough to endanger my life, which, indeed, had hung literally on a thread for some days. 'And I shan't tell you any more now, John,' added my wife, 'so just please to lie quiet and ask no questions. The doctor left word that directly you came to he was to be sent for, and that no one was to be allowed to talk on any consideration whatever.'

I knew this was good advice; besides, whenever my wife told me to do a thing I always did it, which I fancy

is more than some husbands can say, so I just lay still and bided my time.

In the course of an hour the doctor, who had been promptly sent for, arrived. One glance at me was evidently quite sufficient.

'You'll do,' he exclaimed the moment he saw me, the cheery tone of his voice causing the anxious faces of my wife and children to light up with pleasure.

Oh, it's wonderful the amount of comfort a doctor brings into a house of sickness sometimes. One word of encouragement from a practitioner you have faith in very often does a patient more good than fifty bottles of medicine. And it was so in this case; for though I felt very bad not five minutes before, the doctor's confident manner had the effect of putting me on good terms with myself at once.

I knew now that—to use a professional term—I was not to be 'booked through' this journey, at all events, and judging by the expression of their faces—now all smiles—my wife and children were also of the same opinion.

'Well, I've done all I can,' said the doctor, as, after a long examination, he rose to take his departure, 'and now nature must do the rest. Plenty of sleep, plenty of beef-tea and such-like nourishments, and, above all, plenty of rest, and you'll be as right as a trivet in a very short space of time.'

Being a practical man, gentlemen, I acted up to the doctor's advice to the letter. I took it out in sleep as much as possible, I ate whenever I felt hungry (which was pretty nigh all day, I recollect), and my wife, you may be sure, took care I wasn't disturbed in any way.

All visitors—and they were many—were warned off; in fact, I saw nobody but the doctor and my own belongings. Even Inspector Clutchit, who called regularly every day to inquire, and whom I really was anxious to see and have a chat with, wasn't admitted.

At last came the day when for the first time I was able to be moved into the sitting-room and see a little company. The first thing that I noticed as I cast my eye round was a photograph of George on the mantelpiece, and then it flashed across me all of a sudden that I had never seen him since I had been laid up, and to the best of my recollection had not heard his name mentioned. I could not have asked for him.

'Oh, I must have had a rare crack on the head!' thought I.

I made up for deficiencies, however, by losing no time in inquiring for him, with the result that Sophy burst into tears and left the room, and my wife sniffed.

Well, this was a pretty beginning! 'What in the world is the matter?' said I, rather irritably, I fear. 'George is all right, isn't he? He didn't get a crack on the head as well as myself, did he?'

'Oh, John,' answered my wife, bursting into tears, and burying her face in her apron, 'he's gone. I didn't dare tell you before, dear, but he's never been back since the night you was brought home so bad. He went to bed all right, and started off, as we thought, to the station as usual the next morning; but he never went there, and he has never returned since. I can't bear to think of it, John, for I was as fond of George

as if he was my own son, and as for Sophy, she's quite broken-hearted about it, poor girl!'

'And hasn't he written a word since?' I asked.

'He wrote a line to Sophy,' said my wife, 'saying that he had not the heart to face you after you had discovered his goings on; that he had sufficient (he didn't say how he had obtained it) to start him in life, and, not wishing to be a tax upon us any longer, he thought it best for all parties that he should leave us.

'He couldn't thank us sufficiently, he said, for all our kindness to him, and we must not think him ungrateful for going as he did. He loved his dear Sophy, he said, in conclusion, better than anything in the wide world. He would always be true to her, and the moment he could see his way to doing so, he would come and claim her for his wife.

'A nice, kind letter, John,' said my wife, snivelling again into her apron. 'And, oh! I do wish you hadn't gone to that dreadful place that night, and none of this would have happened. George would have been here the same as usual, and you wouldn't have had that broken head.'

Well, this news about George quite upset me, unexpected as it was. I had hoped and thought that the affair at the Wheel of Fortune would have acted as a salutary lesson to him, and that for the future he would have gone straight. As it was, if he got amongst his old companions again he was certain to come to grief eventually.

I had not much time for worrying myself, however, for at that moment Inspector Clutchit was announced.

'Well, John, old friend,' said he, as he shook me

warmly by the hand, and sat down on the side of the bed, 'I'm allowed at last to come and have a talk with you. You've had a nasty tap on the head, John Strong, but it hasn't done you any harm, my boy, either physically or any other way. I've made it all straight with the railway people, you may be sure, and they highly applaud your conduct. As Mr. Ablett remarked to me only yesterday, in speaking of the affair, "It's only what you might expect from John Strong."

'Well,' he continued, 'thanks to you, we popped the darbies on Jim Norton, alias "Carrots," the cracksman from London, and he's at this moment kicking his heels at Millbank, waiting his trial at Old Bailey for burglary and attempted murder. The Scotland Yard people weren't at all wild at us country bumpkins getting the reward? Oh dear, no!' remarked the inspector sarcastically. 'Twenty-five pounds apiece for both you and me, John. Not a bad night's work on the whole, eh, to say nothing of the honour and glory. I shouldn't wonder,' said the inspector, whose spirits rose as he went on—'I shouldn't wonder, between you and me, if the judge didn't make a few complimentary remarks about us two at the trial—not a bit, I shouldn't.

'Now about this nevvy of yours,' resumed the inspector. 'Don't you fret and worry about him. I've spoke to the authorities at the station about him, and they're ready to make any allowance, if only for your sake, and take him back when he returns home, which he will when he's spent all his money, you may depend. It'll do him all the good in the world, in my opinion, especially if he gets out-at-elbows, as he most assuredly

will before long, and finds he has to work for his bread and cheese.

'Let him alone, John, that's my advice, and if he writes don't take any notice of his letters. Wait till he returns of his own accord, like the prodigal son, and then kill the fatted calf for him and I'll come and help you to eat it. There's your gal, too. When I came into the house, blowed if she wasn't doing her level best to spoil them pretty blue eyes of hers by crying fit to break her heart over a letter from your nevvy.

'"Why, you should be above thinking about such a worthless fellow as that," said I, in fun like, "much less cry about him. Forget there ever was such a chap, my dear; there's plenty o' better men than him would jump for joy to-morrow if they could secure you for a sweetheart." Bless you, she up and turned on me like a regular bull-dog in petticoats.

'"You dare say another word against my George, you cruel, wicked man, you!" said she, "and I'll ask father never to let you into the house again. If he does," said she, bursting into a fresh storm of sobs as she left the room, "I'll run away myself."

'You must make it up for me in that quarter, John,' said the inspector, 'for she's a girl for a father to be proud of, in my opinion. Tell the pretty dear I didn't mean what I said, bless her heart! and that I like her all the better for what she said.'

Well, gentlemen, the inspector's words about George were a great comfort to me, and I thought his advice sound, and determined to abide by it. In another fortnight I was quite myself again and able to go about my duties the same as usual, and as there is nothing

like work, and plenty of it, to drive away dull care, George's departure from his home soon ceased to worry me. 'Out of sight, out of mind,' as one might say. He never wrote to Sophy or any of us, so whether he was doing well or badly we couldn't tell. I could see that my wife and poor Sophy felt it keenly, but they never complained—in fact, his name was never mentioned, for though we had never said as much openly, it seemed to be an understood thing between the three of us that it should be so. Well, nearly a year had gone by since the little affair at the Wheel of Fortune, and I had nearly forgotten all about it, when one night, on my arrival at Sleaford at 8.45, an event happened that brought it all back to my memory in double-quick time.

I had seen to my parcels and invoices, said good-night all round, and was just leaving the station to go home, wondering, I remember, what the missus had got for supper, for I was uncommonly sharp-set, when a man, suddenly emerging from the darkness, accosted me.

'Who is it?' said I, for coming suddenly out of the bright station into the dark is apt to be confusing to the sight—'who is it?'

'Don't be hard upon me, uncle; it's me—George,' he falteringly answered.

'George! my nephew George!' I exclaimed; and seizing whoever it was by the arm, I dragged him to the nearest lamp-post to have a better look.

What, this miserable, half-starved scarecrow my good-looking nephew! I could scarcely believe my eyes at first.

'Don't be hard upon me, uncle,' said he in trembling

accents. 'I know you've done with me for good and all; it's only what I might expect. I only ask you for a shilling or two, just to buy me a crust of bread, for, God help me! I've had nothing to eat for two days.'

As he said this he tottered, and would have fallen had I not caught him. Nature had given way at last, and he was in a dead faint. Luckily my house was close handy, so, putting my arm round poor George, I half dragged, half carried him thither without much difficulty.

The poor chap's look when he came to and found himself in the room he knew so well, sitting in the old leather chair, with Sophy on one side of him dabbing his forehead with vinegar, and his aunt on the other crying for joy, I shall never forget. As luck would have it, my wife, by way of a treat, had actually got me a veal cutlet for my supper, so, as I said to her:

'Well, old woman, it's true we haven't got a fatted calf for our prodigal on his return, but we've got a part of one, that's very certain.'

It *was* remarkable, when you come to think of it, for veal cutlet was quite an unusual supper for me, I do assure you.

For some few days poor George was very weak and ill, but kind treatment and good food gradually made another man of him. I think what he felt most was that he never got from one of us a single reproach for his former bad conduct. He seemed to have felt it as his due somehow.

'Don't refer to the past,' were my orders to the missus and Sophy. 'What's done can't be undone, and there is nothing to be gained by raking up old grievances.

Besides, isn't George going to be a good boy for the future? Why, of course he is! I'll get him taken on at the station again before many days are over our heads, and he'll get on like a house afire, I know, and then, when he gets a screw worth the having, why, Sophy shall marry and make a man of him—shan't you, Sophy?'

The very next day I was as good as my word, and went and spoke to my good friend Mr. Ablett about George. He was kindness itself, as I knew he would be. 'I quite agree with you,' said he, 'when you say that the lad has had a lesson that he won't forget in a hurry, and so far from doing him harm, it has probably been the means of doing him a great deal of good. Only let him get rid of his bad associates, and he will do well, I have no doubt. At the end of a week, John, I have no doubt I shall be able to find a berth of some sort or another for your lad. I will do my best, you may depend.'

So I went home that night with a light heart, and we were a cheerful party at the supper-table, I can tell you.

After the women had gone to bed, George, for the first time (for I had never asked him), told me what he had been doing during his absence. He had been betting, it seems, unbeknown to all of us, for a long while before the fracas at the Wheel of Fortune, and having succeeded in winning nearly forty pounds, like many a young man before him, imagined he had at last got upon a regular Tom Tiddlers' Ground. After he went away in disgrace he travelled about with his friend, Sam Crook, and two or three more, to the

different races, and for a time all went well. He kept on winning, and thought he was in for making a fortune. At last his luck turned completely. He never seemed able to back a winner, and finally was reduced to the plight I saw him in when he accosted me that night at Sleaford Station.

'And oh, uncle!' exclaimed George, when he had finished his story, 'I'll never go wrong again. You can trust me for that. I don't deserve such kindness as I have received at your hands, uncle, and everybody else's, if it comes to that, since I came back here—I know I don't! God bless you for it, uncle!

And poor George, bursting into tears, gave my hand a squeeze, and left the room. I had no fear for my poor sister's boy after that, and the pipe I smoked before I went to bed I really think was the pleasantest I ever smoked in my life. Before I finished it a great many things had happened in the future, and all for the best you may depend. Three days after this conversation another event happened that affected both George's future career and mine in a most remarkable manner. It was Sunday afternoon, and being a wet day I wasn't disposed for my usual Sunday's walk into the country, so made up my mind for a pipe, and perhaps a nap afterwards in the great easy-chair instead. Now, I wanted to send a message to another railway guard, a friend of mine, who lived at the other end of the town, so I asked George if he would mind going there for me.

Up he jumped, delighted to be of any use (it was astonishing how eager the poor young chap was to be of the slightest service to any of us now), so accordingly

off he went. It was three o'clock when he started, and we expected him back in an hour easy; but it was tea-time before he turned up again, and when he did, he was that pale that I thought he was ill or something. My wife and Sophy noticed it too, you may be sure.

'Anything the matter, George?' said I.

'Well, uncle,' replied George, 'something is the matter, to tell you the truth, but it's nothing that need make any of you uncomfortable. Only I met somebody I did not want to see. But I think I won't say any more about it now; if you'll give me half an hour after tea is over, uncle, I'll tell you all about it.'

Accordingly, as soon as we had finished tea, my wife and the children went out of the room and left us to ourselves.

The door was hardly closed on them and the tea-things before George, who I could see was in a regular suppressed state of excitement, starts up and exclaims:

'Uncle, I've heard something to-day that ought to make both our fortunes straight off the reel! Uncle, as I was coming home, after leaving your message at Mr. Clark's, I met Sam Crook.'

'What, that blackguard!' I answered sharply, looking hard at George the while. 'I was in hopes, after all that has passed, you had done with him at all events. Not much of a fortune to be made in connection with Mr. Samuel Crook, I should imagine, rather the reverse; and I'll tell you something, George,' said I, speaking as sternly as I could: 'so long as you keep up your acquaintance with that vagabond and others like him, I won't do a thing for you, so mind that. I mean what I say, I assure you.'

'Hear me out, uncle, in common fairness, please, before you judge me,' replied George. 'I pledge you my word, to begin with, that I am no more anxious for Sam Crook's acquaintance than you are. Now listen to my story, uncle: When I saw Sam coming along, I was for avoiding him, but he would insist on stopping me, as he said he had something most particular to say; and as I was afraid of his coming hanging about after me at the station, or at home, uncle, I stopped to hear what he'd got to say. Says he: "George, old pal, I know I've been the cause of losing the most of your money for you—not that it was my fault so much as those cussed race-horses—and now, as some sort of return, I'm going to put you up to a real good thing—something, George, what'll bring you in a lump of money all at once, and enable you to go racin' again, like a real gentleman sportsman." (He knew nothing about the railway company taking me on again, you see.) Well, I cannot say, uncle, I was anxious to hear what this wonderful scheme of his was, but I stopped and listened to what he had to say. Oh, and it was something worth hearing, too, uncle. Such a scheme of wickedness as I never heard of before, excepting in a book, or you either. And this is what it was, uncle. Of course, he swore me to secrecy, but where such a murdering villain—yes, I say murdering villain!' exclaimed George emphatically, giving the table as he spoke a blow with his fist—'as Sam Crook is concerned, I don't feel that I am in the least doing wrong in exposing him. Next week Slumborough Races are on, as you know, and on Tuesday the Great Slumborough Handicap, on which there has been a

lot of betting for a long time past, comes off. The first favourite, and has been all along (don't be cross about my knowing all about it), is a horse called Aristocrat, by—oh, but I forgot, you won't care to hear all about his breed. He is trained at Coverdale, about forty miles from here, I believe.'

'Yes, that's right,' said I; 'I know the place well, and there are some downs there, I've heard, where they train horses.'

'Well, uncle,' continued George, 'Sam Crook somehow or other has found out that Aristocrat and three or four stable companions are to be carried by a special train to-morrow, getting to Sleaford Junction at five o'clock in the evening. There is nothing in that, of course. Now for where the wickedness comes in.

'Sam Crook has been bribed by a bookmaker whose pay he is in—a thousand, the scoundrel has promised him—to lay a large block of stone on the line just beyond Crawford Bridge, so as to upset the train and kill the favourite, whom he has laid heavily against, and who everybody says is perfectly certain to win, bar accident. But what a dreadful thing, uncle! Why, if the train were to go over that steep embankment everybody in it would be killed as well as the horse.'

'The infernal scoundrels! And they want you to help, do they?' exclaimed I.

'Yes, uncle,' replied George; 'Sam said he should have liked only us two in it, but not being able, he said, to get hold of me in the morning, though he had been loafing about outside our place for a long while, he had been obliged to let a third man into the secret,

a man who I used to know, uncle—the son of the landlord of the Wheel of Fortune.

'Then let the two of 'em do the job between them,' said I, 'IF THEY CAN! Keep this to yourself, George, and not a word to your aunt and cousins, mind—not even dear Sophy. I'm going round to the station for a minute on some business, but shall be back in three-quarters of an hour. Wait here until I return, and then we will talk further about the matter.'

So, putting on my hat, I went out. My object in going was to get leave of absence for the morrow, and this I easily obtained. I then returned home, and as soon as the women had retired to bed, I unfolded to George my plans for defeating the infamous project he had told me about. In the morning I had settled in my mind to go straight to our stationmaster and tell him in strict confidence all that I had heard. I intended suggesting to him that he should wire to the station from where the horseboxes were to start, warning them to tell the driver of the train to slacken speed some little time before he reached Crawford Bridge, as there would be 'danger ahead.' That being settled, so that in case the blocks of stone were actually on the line no danger would arise, I turned my attention to what part we—George and I, that is—were to perform. I proposed that we should hide in a fir plantation there was adjoining the line, wait until we had seen the two conspirators with our own eyes place the blocks of granite on the metals, and then rush in and capture them red-handed.

'And now,' said I, 'we'll go to bed. Good-night, George, my boy, and mind, the first thing in the morn-

ing be sure and send a message round to that highly respectable public-house, the Wheel of Fortune, where you say Sam Crook is staying, and say how sorry you are that you can't join him and his friend in their little excursion as you (ha, ha!) have another engagement on hand that you must keep.'

Well, gentlemen, I'm pleased to say that my plan came off just like a piece of machinery. Our stationmaster entered into the spirit of the thing with the greatest alacrity, and made things safe by telegraph just as I suggested. He was rather partial to a bit of racing was our stationmaster, and as it turned out had a five-pound note invested, on the quiet, on Aristocrat for Wednesday's race, so of course was extra keen about it. That part of the business settled, George and I, taking some bread and meat and a pocket pistol full of spirits and water, and armed with two good thick sticks, started off in a roundabout direction for the fir plantation. There we secreted ourselves, enjoyed our lunch and a quiet smoke after, and bided our time.

We watched the two villains arrive; we watched them roll with immense difficulty—Lord! how they puffed and blew, and swore, no doubt!—a great piece of granite from the stone quarry close by, and place it right on to the line; and then, when they were just climbing the rails that bordered the line, we met them face to face. You should just have seen Sam Crook's face when he saw George.

'It's my turn now, Sam Crook,' said I. 'I fancy that I'm indebted to you for that crack on the head I got at the Wheel of Fortune some months ago, and I'll repay you with interest.' And with that I rushed at him to

take him. He was too nimble, though, for me, for he stepped on one side and I fell head over heels, and as I rose to my feet he presented a revolver at my head and fired. The bullet went clean through my billycock hat, and before he could fire again a blow from my stick felled him like a bullock at the shambles. Turning round, I saw George and Wheel of Fortune junior locked in deadly embrace on the ground, George undermost. I very soon released him, you may be sure, and then we bound his opponent hand and foot with some cord I had brought with me. Just then a prolonged whistle was heard. 'Hurrah! the train!' exclaimed George; and so it was. Leaving our prisoners—one insensible, the other well secured—away we both rushed, and by our shouts brought it to a standstill. There was the obstacle on the line to speak for itself. Out jumped the trainer and one or two friends. When I told them the story, showed them the stone on the line, and then pointed out the depth of the embankment, they were dumfounded, I can tell you, and grateful as well—grateful is not the word, indeed. In less than five minutes we had popped our prisoners into the train, and, jumping in ourselves, the train was once more put in motion, and we were soon landed safely at Sleaford. There remains little to be told. Sam Crook and his friend in crime were marched off to the police-station, whilst Aristocrat and his stable companion, little dreaming, poor things, of the danger they had escaped, were walked off to their quarters for the night, their trainer, as he shook me warmly by the hand, saying:

'If you and your nephew don't come to the races

to-morrow, and see our horse win, I'll never speak to either of you again.'

We did go to the races, gentlemen—my wife and me, and George and Sophy—and I think it was the pleasantest day's outing I ever had in my life. Aristocrat won in a canter, and his owner, on behalf of himself and friends, presented me, before we left the course, with a cheque for five hundred pounds, and a week after with a valuable diamond scarf-pin, which I only wear on 'high-days and holidays and bonfire-nights,' as the saying is. Besides that, the railway company behaved very handsome. I was appointed stationmaster here, and George was looked after equally well. So much so that he was enabled to marry Sophy before another year was over.

What happened to Sam Crook and friend? Oh, they were duly tried at the Assizes, and got fourteen years apiece, and serve 'em right.

Inspector Clutchit was the least pleased of anybody, or pretended to be. He came up to me after the trial, and says to me, says he: 'Well, John Strong, I do think you might have given an old friend like me "the office."' But I preferred to 'keep the "good thing" in the family,' I told him.



CAUGHT IN THE TOILS

THE BUTLER'S STORY

'WHY, it's actually Mr. Jubber!' exclaimed our chairman one night, shading his eyes with his hand and peering through the wreaths of tobacco-smoke that hung round him at a new-comer just entering the room —'it's actually Mr. Jubber! Why, you're quite a stranger! Come and sit down here, Mr. J., and tell us all about yourself.'

Thus invited, the personage who had just entered the room, a rosy-faced, well-fed-looking man of some eight-and-forty, or perhaps fifty, years of age, made his way slowly up the room, exchanging greetings as he went (he was evidently well known and popular), and finally brought himself to an anchor on the chairman's left-hand, recognising me with a polite bow as he sat down, a scarcely perceptible elevation of his eyebrows, as much as saying, 'Hallo! how comes it that you are here?'

'Hope I see you well, sir,' he said, leaning across the chairman, whose massive person separated us.

'My principal object in coming here to-night, sir,'

he went on, lowering his voice to a respectful whisper, 'was to bring you a note from the ladies, sir. Not being aware you were in the club-room, sir, I sent it up to your apartments.'

'Oh, thank you,' replied I; 'does it require an answer, do you know? As, if so, I'll send for it at once.'

'I am under the impression, sir,' said Mr. Jubber, 'that it is an invitation to dinner, sir. The fact is, sir, the ladies were only aware yesterday that you were here, and, fearing you might be dull, sir' (a sly twinkle appeared at this point in Mr. Jubber's blue eyes), 'they were no doubt anxious to ask you to The Grange. That is my impression, sir.'

'Very good of them, I am sure, Mr. Jubber,' exclaimed I; 'and how are the ladies—well, I hope?'

'Fairly well, sir, thank you. Miss Jane is never very robust in the winter, you know, sir, but Miss Matilda is remarkably well, sir, I'm happy to say. Indeed, I don't remember, sir, Miss Matilda ever having been better in her life than she is just now, sir.'

The urbane Mr. Jubber was butler and confidential adviser to two old maiden ladies named Crawley, who lived at a pretty house called The Grange, and a most excellent and trustworthy servant he was. The two old ladies, indeed, called him 'The Treasure,' and this being known to everybody about, The Treasure was the name familiarly adopted by everybody when speaking of him.

'How is The Treasure?' was the first question always asked when visitors called on the Misses Crawley at The Grange. I should say, on the whole, that no butler in the United Kingdom had an easier berth of

it than Mr. Jubber. Good wages, good living, scarcely anything to do and plenty of time to do it in—what more could a butler want?

There being some five hundred acres of shooting, including some covert, along with the house, one of Mr. Jubber's occupations—I should say his principal one—was keeping the house well supplied with game; and as he was an excellent shot, and very keen, this part of the play, needless to observe, suited him down to the ground, as the saying is. In short, Mr. Jubber had an uncommonly good berth of it, a fact that no one was more ready to acknowledge than himself. Needless to say, the two old ladies looked upon him as a pearl beyond price. Nor is it to be wondered at, for I don't know what in the world they would have done without him.

This, then, is a slight sketch of the man who, being called upon by the unanimous desire of the Club to either sing them a song or tell a story, chooses the latter alternative, and relates the following personal experience:

When I took in the five o'clock tea-things one evening (it was the footman's place, strictly speaking, to do so, but knowing that the two old ladies, my mistresses at The Grange, preferred me, as it gave them an excuse for a chat, I always made a point of obliging them), one of them—I think it was Miss Matilda, but I won't be sure—addressing me, said:

'Well, Jubber, and what do you think of the new housemaid? Tell us candidly now, do you think she will suit?'

'I think, ma'am,' I replied, 'she is a remarkably good-looking young woman. You see, ma'am, she only came yesterday, so it is impossible for me to tell exactly. I can only say she seems a respectable girl enough, and certainly very clean and tidy, ma'am.'

'Yes, she is very presentable, certainly,' chimed in Miss Jane; 'but you know, Jubber, we want something more than good looks. You see, Jubber, Ann Preedy had been here so many years, and my sister and I were so used to her ways, that we cannot get used to a new maid very quickly. Still, you understand, we have such very great faith in your opinion upon all domestic affairs, Jubber, that if you expressed yourself satisfied with Mary Blake we should feel quite easy in our minds. You see, the servants have all lived so long with us, and we have such absolute trust in every one of them, that we leave our money and jewellery about with perfect confidence; but as you are aware, Jubber, we read such dreadful stories nowadays in the newspapers of robberies by maidservants—especially pretty ones—that it naturally makes one suspicious at first. True, we had an excellent character with the girl from her last place, but even that is not always reliable, you know, and we should, therefore, like your private opinion, Jubber.'

'As you say,' went on good-natured Miss Matilda, 'the poor girl—who, I dare say, is a very good girl if one only knew—has been here such a short time that it would be unfair—most unfair—to judge her too hastily, so we will ask you, Jubber, to keep your eye on her, and to report to us on her general conduct, and so on, in, say, a week's time from now.'

Well, I *did* keep my eye on the young woman,

gentlemen, and a week of her acquaintance only confirmed the original impression upon my mind—namely, that she was as good-looking a girl as one would wish to see—auburn hair, slightly inclined to red; liquid blue eyes; pearly teeth; a trim, compact little figure; and such a foot and ankle! (I wouldn't give a thank-you for the prettiest woman in England, gentlemen, if she hadn't neat feet and ankles.) All these Mary Blake possessed. She was wonderfully quick, and neat too, in her house work. The first morning after she came I superintended in person her dusting of the old china in the drawing-room. Instead of flopping and whisking her duster about, like nine housemaids out of ten would have, upsetting knick-knacks and chipping bits off them, if not worse, Mary treated each individual article as gently and delicately as if it belonged to herself. I could not have done it better myself. Well, it's a remarkable circumstance, gentlemen, but do you know that every blessed morning after that did I find myself as regularly as clockwork drawn—no doubt by one of those mysterious impulses that there is no accounting for at times—towards the drawing-room, where Mary Blake was busy dusting the ornaments.

'Are you fond of china?' said I one morning, as I watched the new housemaid tenderly taking up a little Dresden shepherdess in her hand and gazing at it admiringly ere she replaced it on the mantelpiece.

'Oh yes!' she exclaimed. 'I can assure you, Mr. Jubber, that dusting this room of a morning is a labour of love to me; it is truly. My late mistress gave me a book all about old china, and I—I know something about it, sir. Next to listening to music I think I like

to look at beautiful china. And oh, Mr. Jubber, how lovely you do perform on the violin! When you was playing last night in your room I sat and listened, and it *was* a treat to a poor girl. Yes, and when you struck up, "Home, Sweet Home"—oh, Mr. Jubber, you don't know how I felt. As you played, a mist came over my eyes, and I seemed once more to see the little cottage in the country where I was brought up—such a pretty cottage it was, with its little front garden full of bright hollyhocks and old-fashioned flowers! Yes; there was my poor old mother sitting knitting as usual by the fireside, with her big silver-clasped Bible open on the table by her. Oh, Mr. Jubber, when I thought of it all I could not help crying. I—I c-c-c-cannot help it *now*. Oh, Mr. J-J-Jubber, f-f-forgive me, wo-o-n't you? I c-c-can't help it, you are so k-k-kind to me.'

And with that, blessed if she didn't throw herself into my arms, sobbing as if her heart would break. Well, gentlemen, when a young and lovely woman in distress twines her arms round the neck of a susceptible man, and goes on as Mary Blake did to me that morning, I imagine there is only one thing that man could do under the circumstances, and I did it, gentlemen. I, in short, kissed her.

Ah, it's all very well for you to smile, but I don't believe there's a man in this room but what would have done the same under similar circumstances.

Just fancy, any of you, a pair of liquid blue eyes with a tear in each of 'em looking appealingly straight at you, and a pretty mouth, the parted lips showing the white teeth beyond, only half an inch or so off yours, and ask yourselves how you would have acted.

'*I'd* ha' kissed her—ay, lad, and kissed her again after that, dang *me* if I wouldn't!' exclaimed Farmer Burley, with a hearty bang of his great fist on the table, thereby eliciting a roar of laughter and applause from the whole room.

Joking apart though, gentlemen, it was an exceedingly awkward predicament for me to be in, and I don't really know how I should have got out of it without compromising myself had not the young woman herself helped me out of the dilemma.

'Oh, Mr. Jubber,' says she, holding me tight round the neck and looking up into my face, her innocent blue eyes still brimming over—'oh, Mr. Jubber, do say you'll be a b-b-brother to me; do, d-o-o-o!'

'Why, of course I will, my dear,' I replied, delighted at getting out of my dilemma so easily. 'Of course I will.' I was about to add, 'And there's my hand upon it,' but on second consideration I thought that where a woman was concerned the action would be out of place. So, gentlemen, I—I (ahem!) *kissed her again.*

A shout of laughter from all present, and 'O' coorse you did! Dang it! Whoy not?' from Farmer Burley.

Curiously enough, that very morning made up the week that my mistress had given me in which I was to form an estimate, as best I could, of the character of Mary Blake, and as I took in the breakfast things Miss Matilda reminded me of the fact.

'I am happy to say, ma'am,' I answered, 'that I consider Mary Blake perfect in every possible way. She is modest and unassuming in her manner, and I am bound to say that as a housemaid I never yet saw her equal. I think, ma'am,' I wound up, 'the most fragile china in

the world would be perfectly safe if she had the handling of it.'

'My dear Jane,' exclaimed Miss Matilda, clapping her hands together in great delight—'my dear Jane! there never were, I do believe, such lucky people as we are! We have actually found another TREASURE!'

Well, gentlemen, the interest I took in Mary Blake's career still continued, and I found myself every morning superintending the dusting operations in the drawing-room. I looked upon it, in fact, as part of the day's work, and not an unpleasant portion of it either, not by any means.

The roguish blue eyes (no longer with tears in 'em) would still look into mine in the same pleading, trustful way; the brother and sisterly kiss would still pass between us.

This sort of thing was all very well, but I began to ask myself how would it all end. I found that Mary Blake was perpetually cropping up in my mind when I should have been thinking of other things. Actually one day, when out shooting for the house, a woodcock got up in front of me, and, putting up my gun, I found, on pulling the trigger, that it wouldn't go off. No, for the very good reason why, because there were no cartridges in it. Mary Blake again. Oh, I was so wild, for if there is one bird I like to shoot more than another it is a woodcock, and they are exceptionally scarce in our part of the world. The cock, too, had gone clean off our ground, and I should probably never see him again. 'John Jubber! John Jubber!' I said to myself, 'this will not do, my boy. You who have made a vow of perpetual celibacy to go falling in love like this—for

that's what it is, there's no mistake about it—you ought to be ashamed of yourself.'

The next morning, though it was very much against the grain to do so, I avoided the drawing-room at dusting time. Result: Mary Blake only had one helping of roast-beef at dinner-time, and refused the pudding (roly-poly with raspberry jam) altogether. Her beer seemed to choke her, and there was a reproachful look in the blue eyes that looked for a moment into mine when I went round and clapped her on the back that made me feel a perfect brute.

I determined, though, to be firm, and act the part of the Roman father, no matter what my feelings; and with that view I carefully avoided my fair enslaver all the rest of that day, and the next morning determined, as before, to keep clear of the drawing-room. Alas for my resolution!

Happening to pass the door—quite by accident, of course—I heard a sound as of someone choking within. 'Mary ill, perhaps,' I thought to myself, and at once opened the door.

Yes, there she was, sitting on the sofa with her head buried in the cushions, sobbing as if her heart would break. This was more than I could stand, and forgetting all about the Roman father, I rushed up to her and raised her from her recumbent position.

'What is the matter, Mary, my dear?' I exclaimed, drying her eyes with her own duster as I spoke.

'Oh, go away, go-o aw-a-a-y!' she sobbed.

'No, no; tell me what is the matter. What are you crying for?' said I.

'Oh, Mister Jubber, I l-o-o-ve you so-o, and you're s-s-so cruel!' she replied, sobbing away louder than ever.

Well, here was a pretty go. Of course I made a fool of myself and swore I loved her in return, and all the rest of it, if only to keep her quiet.

'And you will be k-k-ind to me, and show me all the p-p-plate, as you promised?' said she.

'Oh yes, of course I will, Mary, my dear,' I replied, sealing the promise with a kiss. 'And now be off to your room and dry your eyes before any of the other servants see you, and I'll finish your dusting for you. Cut away, there's a good girl,' said I. 'We shall have the ladies down directly, and it will never do for them to catch sight of you in that state.'

So, smiling through her tears, she tripped off, kissing her hand to me as she left the room.

Well, I dusted away at the china ornaments, thinking all the while what a fool I had made of myself, and having just put the finishing touch to an old piece of Crown Derby, was about to leave the room, when, happening to cast my eye towards the sofa on which I had found Mary reclining, I caught sight of a somewhat crumpled piece of paper. On inspection I found it was a letter, and as it commenced, 'Dear Poll,' I guessed at once who it belonged to. So I pocketed it, meaning to hand it to Mary when I next saw her alone. Now, I am not an inquisitive man as a rule, gentlemen, but before I got to my pantry I could no more resist reading that letter than a moth could avoid going at a candle. As it lay in my pocket it seemed to keep saying: 'Read me! Read me! Why don't you Read me? Mary won't know, and what if she does?'



I gave way at last, out came the letter, and sitting down in my easy-chair, I read it without more ado.

The making myself acquainted with the contents of that letter, gentlemen, was just about the best day's work I ever did in my life.

Oh, my word, it was a staggerer!

This is what it said:

'DEAR POLL,

'Hasn't that there old Spooney let you have a sight of the plate yet? Get to see it immediate, as Bill and me want to do the crack next week, and Oliver's (the writer alluded, gentlemen, to the moon) not on the job then. If you can get hold of the old girl's diamonds, you can do 'em up ready for us at the same time. Further perticklers on hearing from you.

'The kids is well, so am I, and I remain,

'Yours affectionate,

'JOSEPH MAGGS.

'P.S.—Is there a Barker on the premises?'

Well, gentlemen, it didn't want much acumen on my part to understand this precious epistle, as you may guess.

It was as plain as day that the party who wrote it meant carrying off my mistress's plate, and that the newly-found Treasure (?), Mary Blake, was in with the thieves.

The next thing to be done, thinks I to myself, is to see whether 'old Spooney' can't get the best of Mr. Joseph Maggs.

Yes, my fine fellow; I have a sort of idea, do you know,

that it is to be done, if I go to work properly. I mean to try, at all events.

With that object in view, after making a copy of the letter, my first act was to go and replace it exactly where I found it. And it was lucky I did, as it happened, for just as I came out Miss Mary Blake bounced in. She came to look for her duster, she said, and it was quite refreshing to note the dash she made for the letter the moment she saw it. Of course I pretended not to notice that part of the performance.

Apparently much relieved in her mind, she now turned her attention to me. 'Is my dear old Johnny—you *are* my Johnny now, aren't you?—going to show me his pretty plate, as he promised to-day?' said the artful little devil, looking up into my face with those great blue innocent-looking eyes of hers, and putting up her face for a kiss, which I hadn't the faintest objection to giving.

'Of course I will, my dear,' I replied. 'Come to my pantry about half-past eleven, and I'll show you the lot.'

'Dear old thing!' exclaimed she, 'I'll come, never fear.' And giving my cheek a playful slap, she tripped off to her household duties.

At the time appointed she duly made her appearance in the pantry, when out came the plate for her edification. There was a tremendous lot of it, and I showed her every bit of it. And what an interest this little treasure of a housemaid took in it! How many ounces did I think it weighed, and what was it worth, and where was it kept? Did I always lock the chest of a night? Wasn't I afraid of burglars? Oh! *she* was.

If they ever came to a house where she was, she was sure she should die of fright. And then the conversation turned on jewellery—the last lady she lived with had such a quantity. Had Miss Matilda and Miss Jane much besides what they usually wore?

Well, I told her all she wanted to know, and a bit more too; and then she tripped off, chuckling, no doubt, the hussy, at having (as she thought) got to the windward of old Spooney.

Directly after luncheon, finding that several things were wanted for the house in town here—books from the circulating library for Miss Jane, and so forth —I volunteered to walk in and see about them myself.

'Oh, Mary Blake, Mary Blake!' said I to myself as, turning round when I had got a short distance from the house, I spied her kissing her hand to me from an upper window, 'if you only knew what my real errand was you'd tremble in those neat little shoes of yours, I know.'

Now, Mr. Benjamin Bagshaw, who was superintendent of the police at that time (you recollect old Ben, gentlemen) was a particular friend of mine. I seldom, indeed, came into the town but what I paid him a visit—p'raps brought him a hare or maybe a brace of birds, for he was very partial to game—and I knew that his dinner-hour was two o'clock, so thinks I to myself, it's now just three, and if I go straight to his house I shall just catch friend Ben as he's smoking his after-dinner pipe, and then we can have a little private talk about this matter. So straight to Ben's house I went, and sure enough found him in as I thought. He had finished his pipe,

indeed, and was taking forty winks with his bandana over his head.

'John, my boy,' said Ben, when I had told him my story, and showed him the copy of the letter to Mary Blake, 'give us your flipper' (Ben was always a bit slangy when excited). 'Since I nailed that covey for the Boxham Wood murder, this is the biggest job I've been in since I've belonged to the force, and I think that if we only use proper discretion, and hold our tongues, we shall make such a haul as will astonish 'em at Scotland Yard. Now, look ye here, John,' says he: 'in the first place, all letters to and fro between Mary Blake, housemaid, and Joseph Maggs, burglar, must be intercepted. That will be, of course, *my* business.

'In the second place, you must go home and make love to blue-eyed Mary—oh, the dear, sweet little innocent!' laughed Ben—'fiercer than ever.'

'Thirdly and lastly, you must go out a-shootin' every blessed afternoon, and meet me regular at four o'clock in the little spinney belonging to your good lady, as runs along the Wallington Road, so that we can keep each other well posted up with the latest intelligence from the seat of war.

'And now, John,' said Ben, 'just one more glass, and then off you go, and do what you've got to do in the town, and I'll take a walk to the post-office and arrange everything there.'

Needless to observe, gentlemen, I did exactly what Ben told me, executed my commission for Miss Jane, and walked quietly home as if nothing had happened. Quietly did I say? No, hardly that, for I was in a perfect fever of excitement, I give you my word. I hadn't

been at home five minutes before Mary came running into my pantry to ask for the loan of a postage-stamp. As I gave it to her, and a kiss at the same time under cover of the cupboard-door, I felt, I do assure you, gentlemen, the most double-faced wretch that ever existed.

Well, acting up to Inspector Bagshaw's instructions, off I went shooting every afternoon, and met him according to appointment in the spinney beside the road, where we duly compared notes on 'coming events.' What the pair of us were anxiously waiting for was the letter from Joe Maggs to Mary Blake, saying when the plant was to come off: and at last, on the eighth day, Ben, with the very broadest grin you ever saw on a human countenance (he had got a rare lot of grinders, had old Ben—more like a horse's than anything else—and he showed 'em all, every one, on that occasion), announced that it had arrived that very day. 'Which I've got it in my pocket,' says he. 'We'll sit down in the ditch and I'll show it you, John. I've read it over,' says he, 'ever so many times already, and I do assure you I relish it each time more and more. Bless you,' says Ben, bursting with laughter, 'I wouldn't swap Joe Maggs's letter for a whole set of Dickens's novels, bound in morocker, blowed if I would! And you know how partial I am to Dickens.'

Accordingly, we sat down in the ditch and read Joe Maggs's precious epistle.

He thanked his dear Polly for the plan of the house and the particulars of the swag, and went on to say that he and his pal would be waiting outside the house at two o'clock in the morning on the Thursday. She

was to undo the bolts of the front-door so that they could slip in, and they would then go straight to 'Old Spooney's' room, gag and bind him if necessary, and walk off with the plate. Finally, she was to give some of 'she knew what' to the dog.

'Ah, that bit about the dog reminds me,' said Ben; 'you'd better get the noble animal away somewhere, John, for the night, or he'll spoil sport, as many a one has done before. You can manage that, no doubt.'

We then settled all our plans. When everybody had gone to bed, I was to let the inspector and two of his men, all in plain clothes, into the house, and secrete them on the drawing-room landing. My next move was to go to the hall door and undo the bolt, so that any one could walk in. Finally, I was to go to bed and await results. Directly I gave out signals of distress the inspector and his two subordinates would rush to the rescue.

When I kissed 'Blue Eyes'—as Mr. Bagshaw in his facetiousness called her—behind the pantry door that evening, I felt more like Judas than ever. The only consolation I had was that she was as false as I was. Well, gentlemen, Thursday night arrived. At half-past ten to a minute Miss Matilda and Miss Jane took themselves off to bed, and, having seen the last of the servants off (I thought that blessed cook never would go), I went softly to the hall door, whistled a bar or two of 'Pop goes the Weasel,' and let Inspector Bagshaw and his two men into the house, old Ben, as he entered, half drawing a pair of handcuffs from his pocket and grinning significantly. Having stowed them away in the drawing-room, I went off to my own



room in the basement in order to prepare for my expected guests.

Now, gentlemen, though I was not in the least jealous of my old friend the inspector, yet I did not see at all why I should not contribute my mite, as I might say (the pun is unintentional, I assure you) towards the capture, if only to show I had as much intelligence about me as other people. Therefore, before I went to bed (which I did with my clothes on, underneath my night-gown) I was careless enough to leave a decanter three parts full of port wine on the table. Was that port wine doctored, do you think, gentlemen, expressly for the burglarious market? Well, I shouldn't wonder, do you know, if it was. Singular, wasn't it? At half-past one I went to bed, and laughed beneath the clothes until I thought I should have choked. Shortly after two I fancied I heard a noise at the hall door, and I covered my head well over with the bed-clothes, and set up the most awful snoring you ever heard. Lord, how I did snore! I kept my ears open, though, all the time. I heard them open the plate-chest. (I had foolishly—ha! ha! ha!—left it open.) I heard 'em shift its contents into a bag or bags, and then—and then, gentlemen—and I give you my word, I almost burst out laughing—I heard 'em pegging away at the port wine.

'Blimy! the cove might ha' ben genteel enough to ha' left us out a wine-glass; what do *you* think, Bill?' I heard Mr. Maggs say, as he filled one of the tumblers, which I had purposely left on the table so as to be handy. ''Ere's to 'is jolly good health, though, anyhow!'

Now I began to listen, if you like, and I had not long to wait for what I expected.

'Joe,' I heard the other man say, 'I feel coming over precious queer about the chump—quite drowsy like.'

'Oh, you'll be all right directly you gets into the fresh *hair*,' growled Joe in reply. 'Come, fill up once more, and then we'll mizzle.'

A loud snore was the response.

Again I listened, and this time I could hear the beating of my own heart, as the song says. I cautiously took a peep over the bed-clothes at the burglars. THEY WERE BOTH FAST ASLEEP. Out of bed I jumped like a harlequin, fished out some strong cord I had purchased expressly for the occasion, and bound the legs and arms of the insensible Joe Maggs and his friend, until they looked for all the world just like a pair of trussed fowls (of the gaol-bird breed, eh, gentlemen?). Next I lit my lamp, and every candle I could lay my hands upon, and finally I blew my whistle for help.

In rushed Inspector Bagshaw and his two men, and stopped paralyzed with wonder at the sight before him. The plate all packed; the two burglars neatly secured. Ben for once was fairly puzzled.

'Why, how the—where the—what's the meaning of it all?' he stammered, looking from me to the men and the men to me.

I struck an attitude, and, pointing to Joe Maggs and his friend, observed quietly, after the manner of a conjurer at the conclusion of a difficult feat of sleight of hand, 'THAT'S HOW IT'S DONE.'



A WOMAN'S REVENGE

THE PAD GROOM'S STORY

'It always beats me, Mr. Bloss,' observed Skinner, the saddler in the High Street, one evening, addressing a smart, dapper-looking personage, who could not honestly be mistaken for anything but what he was—a swell stud-groom—'it always beats me how the dickens it is that your lady has never married. With sich a face, and sich a figure, not to mention her seat on 'ossback and her 'ands, it certainly is a marvel that nobody's wanted to pop her into double harness long before this. The way she led the field the other day in that good thing my lord's 'ounds 'ad from Stoppington Woods did my 'art good to see, that it did. I think I see her now a-comin' at the Sousham brook fifty miles an hour, and yet with her 'oss well in hand all the time. It was a rare treat, that's what it was, and nothing but it.'

'It ain't been for want of askin', Mr. Skinner, you may depend,' replied the other. 'Bless ye, she's 'ad hoffers by the score before now, and not one of 'em with a ghost of a chance if they only knew. No, no. Single she is, and single she's likely to remain, you may be

sure. There was never but ONE in the running, and he's been underground, poor feller, this ten years. It was a sad story—very sad,' said Mr. Bloss, shaking his head in a melancholy manner the while he took a solemn gulp at his gin-and-water.

'Ah, I thought probably there was a reason,' replied the saddler; 'most of us 'ave a skelinton in the cupboard, I expect, if we only knew. P'r'aps,' added he, looking slyly round at the company, 'you wouldn't mind relatin' the circumstance to us, Mr. Bloss, if not of too private a nature.'

'Hear, hear!' pronounced the company; 'and very properly put, Mr. Skinner, sir,' from Droner the vet.

'I'm quite agreeable, I'm sure, gentlemen,' said the swell groom politely, and, suiting his action to the word, he at once plunged into the following story:

It is just thirteen years ago, gentlemen, come next July, that I took service with Miss Coverly—or, rather, I should say with Squire Coverly, her father—my duties being to superintend her horses only, and attend her in her rides and pilot her when she went hunting, the Squire, owing to his increasing years, having given up riding to hounds, though he had the reputation of having been as hard as any of 'em in his day. Pilot her, did I say? I should like to see the man who could *follow* her, let alone pilot her, or come a-nigh if it comes to that; he'd be a something out of the common way, I fancy. I know it was as much as I could do, light weight as I was (I'm not any heavier now, if it comes to that, Mr. Bloss remarked parenthetically, as he cast an endearing glance at his tight-trousered legs, which were decidedly of the 'broomstick' order), to live

with her; and as for piloting her, well, I should have been precious sorry to try, that's all. I fancy I can ride a bit, too. I did ought to, anyhow; for I began life as a lad in the racing-stables at Newmarket, and after that rode second 'oss to Sir Gilbert Northcote in Leicestershire for five years before I got to be his stud-groom, only leaving him at his death, when I went to Squire Coverly, as I have just told you.

Fairfield Hall, where the Squire and his daughter lived all by themselves, was situated in the heart of one of the best hunting counties in England. Nearly all grass it was, and the fences as big as the fields, which was saying a good deal, I can tell you. Three packs of hounds were within reach, so that we had no difficulty in hunting six days a week. Not that there would have been much difficulty in any case, for, sooner than not hunt, Miss Coverly would have got up in the middle of the night, I verily believe. Distance was no object with her, I can tell you, nor weather either. Nothing but the hardest of frosts stopped *us*, I do assure you. Well, I really don't think I ever was so happy in my life before. I might almost say I lived the life of a gentleman. Fond of hunting, fonder still of riding over a country, mounted on horses with quality enough about 'em for a king to ride, the best of good living, and, lastly, a mistress who anyone, I don't care who, would have been proud to serve; what more could a man want? As I have said, I shall have lived in her service now (and I believe I have given every satisfaction) going on for thirteen years, and I wish for nothing better than to end my days in it. I'm not the only one as says that, either. I don't believe there's a dependent

belonging to her of any sort who wouldn't die for her willingly to-morrow, that I don't. And the poor people all round about her own neighbourhood just the same. Though she has let the Hall ever since the sad event I'm a-going to tell you about happened, she never forgets the old people. They have the coals and the blankets and the beef every Christmas just the same as if she was there, and if there's any particular case of distress in the village, the parson has only got to write and it is relieved at once.

'Do your "furriners" go on like that?' demanded Mr. Bloss, with a snort of defiance. 'Not they! and if anybody was to tell me as they did I shouldn't believe him, so it's all the same.'

Well, gentlemen, you all of you know her by sight, so I needn't enlarge about her looks. Anyhow, I fancy you will all agree that so far as beauty goes, she is very hard to beat. I only wish you could have seen her thirteen years ago, and I think you would have said a more lovely young lady you never clapped eyes on.

The beauty is there still—where, I should like to ask, would you match those violet eyes of hers, and that chestnut hair? But the happy expression she used to wear so perpetual is gone—that's where it is—gone, never to return, I very much fear. I don't think I ever saw in Leicestershire, or anywhere else, so many hard riding ladies as there were in our part of the world, but not one of 'em, bless ye, could come nigh us, much less 'cut us down and 'ang us up to dry,' as the saying is. I rather think, indeed, that it was an understood thing among the ladies of the hunt that they recognised our superiority. And she was so sweet with it all that it







was impossible for anyone to be jealous. I think they were all too fond of her for that. There was one exception, though, and that was Miss Lyle, of Crowberry Park—a woman of thirty, I should say, and a great heiress. I forget how much she came into at her father's death, but it was a rare sum of money. She wasn't bad-looking, was Miss Lyle—in fact, some people would call her handsome—but she always carried a cross, discontented look on her face, and I've seen those black eyebrows of hers contract when anything went wrong out hunting, such as being crossed at a fence, or her horse, perhaps, not behaving himself as he ought, in a manner that boded ill for somebody. She was a splendid horsewoman, and as jealous of us, bless you, as possible. I've seen her grind her teeth and turn white with passion when, as was frequently the case, we got the brush given to us. I shall never, if I live to be as old as Methusalem, forget a scene at the end of a run with the Duke of Downshire's hounds one day soon after I went into those parts. We had had a very fast thing from Blessington Gorse—five and forty minutes as hard as ever we could go, winding up with a kill in the open. We had gone as usual owdacious, and close to our skirts all the way was Miss Lyle riding, as jealous as blazes! She did all she knew to get on terms with us, but she never quite managed it, though she was on her best horse, I believe. She had to follow us throughout. You see, where her fault lay was the want of knowledge of pace and lack of judgment in taking her fences, and those were the very two points where we excelled so. I often used to say to myself, as I watched my young lady in a run, sailing away, apparently in an easy canter, but

in reality going at a thundering pace that few could keep up with, 'What a splendid steeplechase rider you'd have made, miss, if you'd been born a man!'

Well, Tom Tootler, the huntsman, off with the brush, and the Duke comes up with it in his hand to give it to my mistress, who richly deserved it. But instead of taking it, what does she do but leans over and whispers something in His Grace's ear. He smiles and bows, for, like everybody else with whom she comes into contact, her word was law with him, and goes off with the brush to Miss Lyle, who was sitting on her chestnut 'oss quite handy, and off with his hat, made her the politest of bows, and, saying something of a flowery nature—the Duke was as soft with his tongue to the ladies as he was rough with the men—my! he could cuss and swear, if you like!—presented her with the brush. And what do you think she did? Instead of taking it as a compliment, she flushed up crimson with anger, her black eyes sparkled again, and her eyebrows contracted until they nearly met, whilst she blurted out before all of 'em, her voice quite hoarse: 'It's very kind of you, Duke, but I don't care about other people's leavings.' And with that, as if seized with a sudden fit of rage, she snatched the fox's brush out of His Grace's 'and, threw it on the ground at his feet, and, turning her horse sharp round, rode off the field at a gallop. The Duke stared, as well he might, for a second, and then, picking up the brush, burst into a roar of laughter. 'Well,' says he, 'if nobody 'll have it, dashed if I don't keep it for myself;' and so saying, he puts it into his pocket and settled the matter in that way. That's what came, you see, of trying to do a good-natured

action, for that's entirely what it was on my lady's part, and she told me as we rode home that day, how sorry she was about it, and how her least intention was to hurt Miss Lyle's feelings. It made her quite unhappy, I could see, and I believe she wrote to Miss Jealous that very night to say so. But it was always my belief that Miss Lyle hated us like poison, and later on I found that I was right. Oh, she was a bad, vindictive woman, that Miss Lyle, and I don't wonder that nobody about her had a good word to say of her. They said she led the poor lady who was her companion up at the Hall the life of a dog, and her maid just the same. I don't wonder the men fought shy of her, in spite of her riches. They were all afraid of her, it's my belief. I did hear that a curate, having fallen in love with either herself or her money—the latter most likely—tried it on, and was seen to leave the Hall five minutes afterwards a good deal quicker than he came, and minus his hat, which came flying out of the drawing-room window after him.

As yet, if I mistake not, I have only mentioned the ladies of the hunt, and said nothing about the men—well, they were a hard-riding lot on the whole—decidedly a hard-riding lot; and among these two or three out-and-outers, the sort of men who were capable of taking the lead and—what is more important—keeping it, in any company. Of course, there was a best—there always is with every pack of hounds—and our show man was young Mr. Charles Peyton, of Danby Hall. I really think, young as he was, he was the best horseman I ever saw. The family was very poor, and Mr. Charles, not having the money to buy expensive cattle, had to breed his own hunters, and make 'em, too, I can tell you.

Most of those he rode were bred on the estate, but occasionally he would buy one at a low figure—one probably that no one else could ride—and at the end of the season would sell him for ten times what he gave for him. One little brown 'oss he picked up for thirty sovereigns—I saw him myself jump some rails alongside the railway that no one else would have—and he sold him the same day for three hundred guineas. Oh yes, the whole of the hunt was proud of him, I can tell you; so much so, that when he rode for the first time in the Hunt Cup, at the annual Spring Meeting, you could scarcely get an offer against him from the bookies at last, the natives made him such a hot favourite; and he landed their money, too, for them in fine style. After this, he took to riding a good deal in steeplechases, and had a mount in all the principal races the following year, including the Grand National. If the horse he rode at Aintree had been as good as his rider he couldn't have lost; as it was he was nowhere. Lor' bless yer! half the county journeyed to Liverpool to see him win—people who had never been there before in their lives—and backed his mount through thick and thin, though it was pretty well known—in fact, Mr. Charles told everyone so himself—that the horse had no chance.

The very next spring, as luck would have it, the Grand National Hunt, who, as I suppose you are aware, hold their meeting in a different place every year, fixed on our county for their races.

I wish, gentlemen, from the bottom of my heart, that the Grand National Hunt had never been thought of. Such a sentiment, coming from my lips, may possibly

seem to you out of place, but when I think what sad results arose from this particular meeting, my feelings get the better of me.

Well, of course, it was rather an important event in the country. Everybody filled their houses with company, expressly for the occasion; several balls were given on the strength of it; beds were at a premium in the town of Risborough, which was the nearest point to the course—in fact, the whole county went mad over the event.

There was a first-class entry, not only in number but in quality, some of the horses having a great reputation in private. Oddly enough, the only competitor in the race hailing from our part of the world was one belonging to Miss Lyle—a five-year old brown horse called Evening Star, by Astronomer, out of Brilliant. A fine slashing hunter he was, and a magnificent fencer, though rather apt to get his head up and take too much out of himself if he did not get exactly his own way. His mistress not being very popular, the entry was not taken much notice of at first, but when it came out, which it did about a week before the races, that Miss Lyle had requested Mr. Charles Peyton to ride her 'oss as a particular favour to herself, and that he had consented to do so, there was such a rush to get on to his mount that I'm blessed if he wasn't made second favourite from sheer weight of money and nothing else. Well, the important day arrived, and a very fine one it was: the sun shone brightly; the wind, though in the east, kept down—in fact, it looked as if the clerk of the weather was on his very best behaviour, expressly for the occasion. Oh, there was a crowd, I can tell you!

There were fifteen runners in the Grand National Hunt Steeplechase, and a rare good-looking lot of hunters they were. It was put about that there was a real good thing for it in the favourite, a horse called Chasseur d'Afrique, by Zouave. They called him grey, but he was in reality a black, ticked with a few white hairs, and such a beauty! as handsome as paint, as fit as a fiddle, and the best gentleman rider in England on his back. You *must* have a good look in, said I to myself, and I walked off to the stand and put a couple of sovereigns on him at four to one. The money on the favourite, of course, came from the knowing ones, but you should just have seen the natives a-putting of it down on Evening Star! It'll be bad for some of the small fry outside if he wins, I thought, as I watched the yokels cramming on their silver to back him. 'Ar say, marster,' I heard one of 'em say to an outside betting man, 'what be 'ee a-bettin' against Muster Charles's charnce?'

'Mister Charles? why, there ain't no sich 'orse, stupid-head!' replied Booky.

'Oh, yeas there be; I means 'im in the blue and yaller, wot's just gone down. Look! yonder he be,' pointing to Mr. Peyton, who, having cantered down, was now walking his horse back.

'You means Evening Star!' exclaimed Booky. 'Why didn't you say so at first? Five to one to you. How much? Come, look sharp!'

'Foive shillings,' replied Mr. Chawbacon, pulling a crown out of his pocket and handing it over with a broad grin, in exchange for a ticket.

It says a good deal, I think, for the quality of the



UP THEY ROSE AT THE HURDLES.



competitors that, notwithstanding the country was decidedly on the big side, being all natural fences, indeed, with the exception of the brook, hardly any of the horses made a mistake, and a mile from home twelve out of the fifteen were well in the race, and going strong. Coming up to the last hurdle seven horses were so close together that you could have covered them with a sheet, conspicuous in the centre being the bright amber and blue-sleeved jacket worn by Miss Lyle's jockey. So strong and well was her horse going that already a roar went up from the stand of 'Evening Star wins!' As they came nearer the hurdles I noticed how strong and well my fancy, Chasseur d'Afrique, was going—pulling double, in fact.

'It's either the Chasseur or Evening Star for a hundred!' I exclaimed, as the pair came on, touching one another.

Up they rose at the hurdles. The Star jumped them splendid, and so would my horse but for the brute who was on the other side of him, who swerved against him, nearly throwing the son of Zouave slap down. As it was, his jockey pulled him together in the most artistic manner I ever saw and set him going again, but he had lost too much ground to recover himself, and Mr. Charles, sending his horse along the moment he saw what had happened, managed to win by a length, amidst such cheering and waving of hats as I never saw equalled on any race-course. Mind ye, the other one would have won but for that unfortunate cannon, for he made up his lost ground in an astonishing way. However, it was the fortune of war, and had to be put up with, like a good many other things.

Well, having lost my money, I thought I'd saunter about the course and look about me a bit, and in my wanderings I found myself close to Miss Lyle's carriage, just as her successful jockey came up to congratulate her on her horse's victory, and to receive hers in return.

I scarcely knew the woman, do you know, she looked so happy—so different to what she generally did. I'm sure, out hunting sometimes the expression on her face would turn cream sour. Says I to myself as I saw the look she gave Mr. Charles, 'If you're not in love, my lady, for once in your life, I'll never judge by a woman's face again. There is such a thing, miss, as being disappointed in love: mind *you* ain't, that's all; for I rayther think that Mr. Charles's affections are bestowed already—to a charming young creature, too, as you're not in the hunt with.'

'And now, won't you have some luncheon? You must want it after your ride,' I heard her say to her jockey, putting on a languishing sort of look in her big black eyes that I shouldn't have thought her capable of.

'No, thanks, Miss Lyle,' replied Mr. Charles. 'I am afraid I must ask you to excuse me. The fact is,' he blurted out, 'I promised to have lunch with the Coverlys directly I had been to congratulate you.'

'Oh, by all means go and keep your engagement,' said Miss Lyle, drawing herself up, and looking as black as thunder. 'I would not be the means of preventing you enjoying the delightful society of the fascinating Miss Coverly for worlds.'

I don't think Mr. Charles noticed the spiteful way she spoke; anyhow, he said nothing, but, taking off

his hat and wishing her good-bye, off he walked past her.

'Checkmate for you, you vixen,' thinks I to myself. 'If I look at your face any more it'll spoil my appetite for lunch, so I'll slope off too,' and I accordingly followed Mr. Charles to our carriage, where sat the Squire and his daughter, just commencing their lunch. Oh, how proud my young lady looked as Mr. Charles described the incidents of the race to her. It didn't want much discrimination to tell what was going on in that quarter. Why, anyone could see with half an eye that each of 'em worshipped the ground t'other walked upon. And surely they was made by nature for one another: the same tastes in common, the same love of riding across a country. I never see such a well-matched pair for double harness in all my born days. And harnessed together they would have been, too, if it hadn't been for that cursed steeplechase, in a manner, and Miss Lyle.

When I think of it, it makes me downright mad, that it does.

Well, shortly after the race, won by Miss Lyle's mare, the last meets of the Duke's hounds were advertised; and high time, too, for the farmers had begun to trim the hedges, the lambs were skipping about, and the woods all full of violets and primroses, all going to show that spring had arrived in real earnest.

About the same time another event was given out, which I for one was not surprised at, for I had seen it coming on for some time past, with very great pleasure, you may depend, which was the engagement of Mr. Charles Peyton to my dear young lady. That

night, gentlemen, for the first time for many years, I took more than was good for me in the way of drink, and am not in the least ashamed to own it. Of course, though we didn't expect much sport, we attended those final meets, and of course Mr. Charles Peyton (growing tenderer and tenderer each day to someone) was one of the party.

It was on a Thursday, I remember, and it was the very last fixture but one, that being on the following Saturday. The three of us rode up to the meet (Mr. Charles had picked us up half-way), and as we got there, the very first person we met, sitting on her horse, not a soul speaking to her, as usual—for somehow people, men especially, never seemed to cotton to her—was Miss Lyle, looking paler than usual, to my mind, and with a queer, uncanny sort of look that I never remembered to have noticed before on her face.

To my great surprise, she actually of her own accord came forward to meet us, and greeted my lady and Mr. Charles in the most friendly, not to say affectionate, way, overwhelming them with congratulations.

'Why not?' says you. 'Surely a very natural thing for her to do.' To which I reply: 'Certainly, very natural!' But, then, don't you see, she never went on in that sort of a way, as a rule, so you can hardly wonder that I felt rather surprised. Indeed, I couldn't help saying to myself: 'What's in the wind now, I wonder?'

'Good-morning, Miss Coverly; good-morning, Mr. Peyton,' says she in the most affable manner possible, and smiling away all over her face, as if the sight of the pair of 'em was as welcome to her as flowers

in May. 'I was particularly anxious to see you, Mr. Peyton, before the hounds moved off to draw,' she went on, 'because,' says she, 'I want to ask you to do me a very great favour.'

'You've only got to name it, Miss Lyle,' answered Mr. Charles in his pleasant way, 'and it's done—if, that is to say,' he added, 'it lies in my power.'

'Oh, it's quite in your line, I assure you,' was the laughing reply. 'Nothing more than to ride a new horse I have just bought next Saturday, and tell me what you think of him. He only arrived from London yesterday, and I haven't the pluck to ride him myself, or I wouldn't ask you. He's quite thoroughbred, and I think you'll say he looks like going. At all events, will you try him for me, and tell me if you think he is quiet enough for me to ride? We poor timid women, you know, Mr. Peyton, have such things as nerves, and I fear I am not exempt from the failing.'

'Well,' thought I, 'that's pretty warm, that is. Why, of all the determined 'osswomen I ever set eyes on, I think you're the fiercest. Nerves! Why, I don't believe you've got such a thing as a nerve about you!'

'I shall be most happy, I'm sure, Miss Lyle,' replied Mr. Charles. At the same time he added: 'You will excuse my saying that I can't agree with you as to your want of nerve, for I don't think I ever saw a more determined horsewoman than yourself. Anyhow, if you'll send the steed in question to the meet on Saturday, I'll get on him and see what he's made of. I don't suppose we shall have much of a day, as there's so very little scent just now, but I can lark the new

purchase over a fence or two, if it comes to the worst —can I not?'

Now, I don't know how it was, but I had a sort of presentiment come over me that Miss Lyle meant mischief in some sort of way. I felt perfectly certain that she was in love with Mr. Charles herself, and was mad with rage, for all her show of pleasantry, at having the ground cut from beneath her feet by her rival. With these thoughts running through my brain, I determined to try and find out whether the new horse had anything to do with it. Miss Lyle's own groom was a surly, ill-conditioned fellow, and he and I, as a rule, had very little to say to each other, so I knew that it would be of no use trying to pump him in the matter. But, thinks I, I know, I fancy, how I can get at you, my lass, and that's through my wife's niece, Jane Brown, who is under-housemaid at Miss Lyle's, and is keeping company with Joe Sparrow (the groom in question). She'll worm it out of him if anybody will. Accordingly, that very night, after we had got in from hunting, I took and drove a dog-cart over to Crowberry Hall. She was a sharp girl, and very quickly understood what she had to do.

'I'll get it out of him, never fear, uncle,' said she, delighted at the job, 'and I'll send over a lad with a letter to you, addressed to aunt, some time to-morrow.'

I went off well satisfied; and, sure enough, true to her word, just as I was smoking my after-dinner pipe the next day, a boy turns up with a letter from Jane. It was a very short one, so I am good for every word of it. This is what it said:

'DEAR UNCLE,

'See as Mr. C. don't ride Miss L.'s horse to-morrow. My duty to aunt, and I remain your affectionate niece,

'JANE BROWN.'

I smoked my pipe, read the letter over four or five times, and finally put it into my pocket, went up to the house, and asked to see my mistress. She was at luncheon, and Mr. Charles was with her, and she sent out word that they were coming out to the stables almost directly. In a quarter of an hour down they came, and then I told them both straight what I thought, finishing up my story with Jane's letter.

Well, my dear young lady thought there was something in it, and, being upset, as I could see, begged Mr. Charles not to ride the horse. But he laughed the idea of anything being wrong to scorn, and said he most certainly should not go from his promise to Miss Lyle. And as, after a good deal of talking, he brought my lady to his own way of thinking, I saw there was no use in my saying any more on the subject. For all they said to the contrary, though, I couldn't get it out of my head that something dreadful was going to happen, and I never slept a single wink all that night in consequence. It was a presentiment that I had, and nothing could drive it away. The morning came at last, and away my lady and me started for the last meet of the season, picking up Mr. Charles at his own lodge-gates, which were about half-way. The meet was at Slappington Castle, where the Duke's family lived, and, being the last day of the season, there was an immense

large company present, His Grace having opened his house to all comers. It was twelve before they thought of making a move.

'And now for this fiery steed that I am to ride! Which is it?' exclaimed Mr. Charles, as he and my young lady and Miss Lyle all three together emerged from the front-door.

'This is the 'oss, sir,' said Miss Lyle's man, indicating as he spoke a very handsome chestnut horse, which was led about by a groom.

'Oh, that's him, is it? Well, he's good-looking enough for anything,' replied Mr. Charles; 'seems a little nervous, though,' he added, as he eyed the way the animal fidgeted about. 'He'll be better after a bit, no doubt, when we move off. Now, ladies, let me put you up, and then I'll mount the stranger, and put him through his paces.'

And having put Miss Lyle and my lady into their saddles, he jumped on the chestnut's back. A good-looking horse he was and no mistake, but there was a queer look about his eye that I did not quite understand. However, thought I, it might be only fancy on my part, and one thing is very certain, and that is, that if you're trying any games on with Mr. Charles, you'll find you've got your master, I fancy. Away we went across the park to draw the Home Wood. The chestnut seemed rather excitable, but otherwise went very well, jumping a flight of rails his rider put him at in the style of an accomplished fencer; and, having gone out of his way to take him over one or two ordinary fences, Mr. Charles pronounced Miss Lyle's chestnut to be a nice horse, and nothing but it. 'And I should

say,' he added, 'he would carry you, Miss Lyle, like a bird.'

Well, we had no sport, as might be expected, the country being as dry as a bone, and not an atom of scent, and it was simply a case of riding about from covert to covert. All had gone well so far, and I had begun to think that Jane Brown must have made a mistake, and I was an old woman, when all of a sudden, as we were standing about in a road that ran between two woods, and I was talking to a party of several second-horsemen, I suddenly heard my name mentioned.

A groom, riding up with a pale face, was inquiring for Mr. Bloss.

'There's been an accident,' says he, pointing with his whip down the road—'an accident to Mr. Peyton,' he says, 'and your missis is hollerin' for you.'

I turned as white as a sheet, they told me, as I galloped off to where I saw signs of an unusual commotion, and, making my way through the crowd, a nice sight met my eyes. There in the middle of the road lay Miss Lyle's chestnut horse, stone dead. Close by, supported in the arms of the Duke himself, who knelt by his side in the road, lay poor Mr. Charles Peyton, a look like death on his face; whilst on the other side, wiping his forehead with her handkerchief, knelt my poor mistress in a terrible state of distress. Miss Lyle, with a fixed, stony look on her pale face, sat on her horse close by.

'Here comes the doctor!' said someone in the crowd, as Dr. Jameson, who happened to be out, arrived on the scene, jumped off his horse, and at once knelt down by the injured man.

He looked hard at him for a moment, and then passed his hand over Mr. Charles's heart.

'The Duchess's carriage is there, doctor,' said the Duke. 'He had better be driven up to the Castle, had he not? It's nearer than home, you know.'

'The carriage, by all means, your Grace,' replied the doctor, rising to his legs; 'but Mr. Peyton had better be driven straight home,' and he whispered something at the same time in the Duke's ear.

I saw a change come over His Grace's face as he glanced hastily at my mistress, and I well knew what that whisper was. My poor mistress, happening to look up, saw the Duke's pained expression, and at once guessed the truth. Giving one look of reproach at Miss Lyle (I can assure you, gentlemen, that look sometimes haunts me now), she fell in a swoon on the prostrate body of her lover. Yes, it was too true! Poor Mr. Charles Peyton would never more go out hunting or ride another steeplechase. He was dead. The chestnut, without the slightest warning, was suddenly seized with a fit of what is known as the 'staggers,' had reared straight up on end and fallen back dead on the hard road, crushing his rider beneath him in his fall. It was a case of a 'Woman's Revenge.'

People declared that Miss Lyle knew all about the horse's infirmity when she bought it, and had adopted the expedient of getting Mr. Charles Peyton to ride the horse on the off-chance of a catastrophe happening, in order to revenge herself on the hated rival who had cut her out in her misplaced affections.

It was a dreadful thing to say of any woman, but it is to be feared that the accusation was nothing but truth.

Anyhow, Miss Lyle, finding herself avoided by everybody, shut up her house and went to live abroad, where she has been ever since, and where I sincerely hope she will stay.

My mistress stayed on at the Hall until the Squire died, since which time she has never lived there. In the summer she generally goes to some seaside place, the wilder and quieter the better. In the winter she hunts, and seldom in the same place for more than one season.

There is one thing, gentlemen, that you may be quite certain that she will never do, and that is, marry. And you know the reason why.

THE LOTTERY TICKET

THE DECAYED GENTLEMAN'S STORY

WHEN, as I made a point of doing, I paid my accustomed visits o' nights to the Horse-shoe Club, I always found a seat reserved for me on Bob Magnum's (the chairman's) right hand, which position I found very convenient, as Bob, being 'well acquaint,' as they say north of the Tweed, with all the members, was naturally well qualified to tell me who they were and what they were—all about them, in fact.

I had noticed that every night when I visited the club the chair at the far end of the long table was occupied by an elderly gentleman of somewhat mildewy appearance, who invariably, on my entrance into the room, rose from his seat, removed the churchwarden that he always smoked, from his lips, and made me a solemn bow, which I as solemnly returned ere I sat down. This ceremony went on for several nights, and at last I took it upon myself to inquire of our jovial chairman who the venerable one was.

'Oh, that's old Mr. Grounsell,' replied Bob calmly; 'he's a decayed gentleman, that's what *he* is, poor old fellow.'

'A decayed gentleman!' replied I, rather horror-struck, for I didn't quite grasp Bob's meaning for the moment; and I found myself taking a hasty glance at the old gentleman as he sat sipping his gin-and-water and smoking his long pipe, just to see if any part of his human anatomy had had enough of him—an arm drop off, or perhaps a leg.

Bob evidently read my thoughts, for he laughed and said: 'Oh, I didn't mean that the old boy was diseased or anything like that, but only that he had seen better days, don't you know, sir. He lives along with a married daughter, Mrs. Mallard, who keeps the circulating library in the High Street, and I believe is supposed to help in the business, but, between you and me, I don't think he does much, except to read the papers. Betting, I fancy, brought him down in the world, and I don't believe the lesson he's learnt has done him much good, for when the racing season is on, nothing the poor old gentleman likes so much as discussing the merits and chances of the horses with anybody he can get to talk with him. He can't bet, though, for the very good reason why, because he's got no money to bet with, he having, I'm told, literally nothing but a small allowance his good daughter makes him, just sufficient to keep him in tobacco and a glass or two in the evening. But there is just one little gamble the poor old gentleman manages to go in for once a year, and that is the Derby lottery. I always have one here every year, just for the amusement of the customers. It's only five shillings each, and Mr. Grounsell is one of the first to put down his name for it, and I verily believe goes to bed every night and dreams he's drawn the winner. He won it one year, I

recollect, and, lor' bless you! the place would hardly hold him in consequence. I was just telling this gentleman,' said Bob, raising his voice and addressing Mr. Grounsell, who happened to be looking our way—'I was just telling this gentleman how lucky you were with our Derby lottery here five years ago.'

'Oh, were you, Bob, were you?' quavered the old man, evidently well pleased. 'Yes, sir, I recollect it well. Something—I don't know what it was—but something impelled me to choose No. 43 in the lottery, and sure enough, when the affair was drawn in this very room, I was lucky enough to get the favourite, King Arthur. I wouldn't sell him, though, sir—no, I wouldn't sell him on any account, though I had no end of offers, and he justified my confidence, sir,' said Mr. Grounsell proudly, banging his fist upon the table, 'by winning the Blue Riband of the turf, as that great man the late Earl of Beaconsfield called the Derby, in a common canter—a common canter, sir.'

'You've put into a many lotteries in your time, I 'xpect, haven't you, Mr. Grounsell?' observed Bolus, the chemist, with a wink at the assembled company.

'I have. A great many,' replied Mr. Grounsell with dignity.

'And won a good lot, no doubt,' went on this gentleman.

'No, there you're wrong,' answered the old gentleman; 'for barring the one in this very house—the one we have just been talking about—I never won a sweep in my life. I made a tidy sum out of a lottery ticket, though, one year—a good long while ago now—and as the circumstances attending it were somewhat remark-

able, I shall be happy to tell you all about it, if the present company would care to listen.'

The idea meeting with general approval from everyone in the room, glasses were refilled, and Bob Magnum having imposed silence by knocking loudly on the table with the presidential hammer, the 'Decayed Gentleman' commenced the following story:

I was born, gentlemen, in a village some three miles from Newmarket. It cannot, of course, interest any of you in the slightest degree to know the exact locality of my birthplace, and I merely mention the fact because it explains in a great measure the extraordinary fascination horse-racing has had for me all my life. Even now, though I never bet, I still continue to take the liveliest interest in the sport of kings. I make careful analyses of the great handicaps, study closely the performances of the horses, and then on each race day I make fancy bets with myself. You've no conception, gentlemen, of the magnitude that my operations in the ring assume sometimes. Bless you, if I get hold of what I think to be a real 'good thing,' I think nothing of laying six to four in thousands.

I spotted the winner of the Cambridgeshire last year the moment the weights were out, and I took the long odds about him before the acceptances appeared, to win me seventy thousand pounds, my commission averaging thirty to one. It was a pity it was all make-believe, wasn't it, gentlemen? Sometimes, of course, I have a bad week with myself, and the whole thing seems so real to me that I actually find myself waking up in the night and wondering how in the world I shall

manage to settle my account on the Monday. Altogether, gentlemen, I manage to extract a great deal of amusement from the turf—just about the same amount of fun, indeed, that my little three-year-old granddaughter Flossie gets from the doll I purchased for her on her last birthday.

Well, gentlemen, as I have told you, born and bred as I was in such close proximity to the metropolis of the turf, so to speak, and hearing nothing but racing talk day after day, to the exclusion of all other topics, you can hardly wonder that by the time I arrived at man's estate I found myself thoroughly inoculated with turf fever. When I was nineteen only my father died, and, owing to his infatuation for the same amusement, he left his family in very poor circumstances, so much so that I was obliged at once to seek employment. An uncle of mine, my mother's only brother, procured me a desk in a first-rate merchant's office at Liverpool, and thither I went within a fortnight of my father's death.

'And let me give you a piece of advice, William,' said my uncle, the night before I started. 'Whatever you do, don't bet. If you do, and you are found out in the office, they will get rid of you as sure as you are born. Not only that, it is sure to lead to ultimate ruin. So take my advice, my boy, if you want to get on and prosper and be of help to your mother and sisters: leave gambling alone for the future. It's bad enough for those that can afford to lose; how much worse, then, must it be for one like you, to whom every penny is of importance!'

My uncle was a kind man, and, as I had a great liking as well as respect for him, his last words to me carried

great weight with them; so much so, that by the time I had come to my journey's end, I had fully determined in my own mind that for the future I would bid good-bye to all thoughts of my engrossing pastime and attend strictly to my business. It was unfortunate that I should have arrived at my destination just on the eve of an important race, but so it was. What was in those days a very important event in the racing world—viz., the Chester Cup—was coming off the following week, and one could not in consequence walk along a street without being made aware of the fact. Knots of idlers, sporting clerks, etc., were to be seen congregated at each corner, eagerly discussing the merits and chances of the different competitors.

I quickly found, too, that when my uncle said that if my betting was found out in the office I should probably get what is vulgarly known as the 'sack,' he was rather overstepping the mark, for it was very certain that if I were to get my congé for such an enormity, my fellow clerks, with hardly an exception, would have to share the same fate, nearly all of them being partial to backing their fancy for all the great events. One of them, a young man of the name of Parker, some few years older than me, seemed the most knowing one of the lot, being evidently looked up to as an authority upon turf matters by all the rest.

He was evidently a gentleman with a good opinion of himself, and seemed rather inclined to give me the cold shoulder at first; but the moment I casually let drop in the course of conversation that I came from Newmarket, he very quickly changed his attitude towards me, and, sidling up soon after, kindly offered, as I

was strange to the place, to accompany me when I went out at one o'clock to my dinner, and point out to me where was the best place to dine—'show me the ropes,' as he termed it.

I accepted his offer with thanks, and at the appointed hour out we went, and I am bound to say I had no cause to regret having accepted his invitation. We had a capital dinner at a certain snug chop-house, where my mentor, being evidently well known, was received with every attention, and then rose with the intention of taking a stroll through the town before returning to the office.

'By the way,' observed my companion, on our emerging in the street, 'I want to see how Uncle Tom's going for the Chester Cup. If you don't mind, we'll just have a look in at the Lane and find out. I heard this morning that he was going rather queerly in the market, and I have backed him pretty heavily, so am a bit anxious.' The Lane turned out to be a very narrow thoroughfare, with a high wall on one side and hoardings covered with advertisements on the other, where originally houses had been. Against the wall in question were numerous betting men standing on stools with their clerks, lists and all complete, shouting the odds with all their might and main. The Lane itself was crowded with backers of all sorts—flash-looking clerks, burly warehousemen in their shirt-sleeves and leather aprons —every species of working man, in fact, all jostling one another in their eagerness to put a crown, or even a shilling, on their fancy for the 'Coop'; for the magnates of the Lane, acting, no doubt, upon the principle that little fish are sweet, were not a bit proud as to what they took. Well, Uncle Tom, we found, had a tendency

to go up in the market if anything, much to Parker's satisfaction; indeed, he invested another sovereign on him there and then. Alas for my good resolutions! 'Evil communications corrupt good manners,' as the copybooks say, for before we left the Lane I had invested a couple of pounds of my own money on the same noble animal to win and a place, at twenty and five to one respectively. My companion and I turned into a house of call of his and drank success to Uncle Tom.

The Chester Cup came, and our horse won. I really believe it would have been a good thing for me if he hadn't, for from that time forth the Turf, and the Turf only, was uppermost in my thoughts.

Well, during the three years I remained in Liverpool I was wonderfully lucky, and at the end of that time I actually managed to save over a thousand pounds. It was at that period of my career that, going home to my mother's for a fortnight's holiday, I met with my future wife. Her father, who was a retired lieutenant in the navy, with a shocking temper, refused to give his consent to our wedding until I was in receipt of three hundred a year at least, and as I knew it would be a long while before that halcyon period arrived, I persuaded my Bessie to make a bolt of it. She, after a long demur, at last consented, and accordingly one fine day we took French leave, and went and got married on our own account.

Bessie eased her conscience in the matter by writing a penitent letter to her father immediately afterwards, which letter the lieutenant returned unopened by the next post, which was rude, to say the least.

Nothing daunted, we took a little cottage at Hamp-

stead—a perfect little nest it was—and, having settled down, I determined to let business run loose for the present at all events, and try and turn my talents to account by betting. Hitherto I had only betted in small sums—at the most a five-pound note at a time. If, then, I argued with myself, I can make twelve hundred pounds with such trifling investments as I have been in the habit of indulging, how much more ought I to make by speculating on a larger scale?—of course, with discretion—oh yes, of course, with discretion!

Accordingly, I proceeded to carry out my resolution, and began to attend the different race-meetings as regularly as the most ardent turfite. Things went fairly well for the first year. If I didn't win a great deal, I, at all events, was not out of pocket, and that was something. Soon after Christmas Bessie's baby was born. You all know her, gentlemen, and what a comfort she is to her father in his old age (at this stage Mr. Grounsell shed a tear or two into his gin-and-water), and there wasn't a happier household in England, I'll venture to say, than the tenants of Woodbine Cottage.

Well, spring arrived in due season, and, buckling on my armour once more, I kissed Bessie and the child, and started one cold morning in March for Lincoln, to once more try my luck at the hands of my fickle mistress, the Turf.

That year was a decided success in every way. I began well and wound up well, and even Bessie began to look upon racing with a more favourable eye than she had done hitherto. How I would give it to the ring next season was my perpetual thought during the winter months. I was so eager to begin that I thought

the winter never would go. At last it disappeared, and once more did I find myself departing for the wars like a warrior of old.

It would have been a good thing for me had I stayed at home. At Lincoln, favourite after favourite went down, and I couldn't back a winner; in fact, it was the worst meeting I had ever had since I commenced going racing. Of course, gambler-like, I expected to get it all back again, but unfortunately I did not. Lincoln, indeed, was only a forerunner of similar disasters. Finally, rendered desperate by failure after failure, I went a raker for a horse that I had heard on unquestionable authority was a real 'good thing' for the Cambridgeshire. He came in last but one in the race, and I found myself irretrievably ruined.

I was positively ashamed to look Bessie in the face when I got home, but she behaved like the true, kind-hearted woman she was, and never once upbraided me, richly though I felt I deserved it.

'Never mind, Peter dear,' said she, caressing me; 'I feared somehow it would come to this sooner or later, and if the crash has come a little sooner than I expected, why, we must make the best of it, that's all. You must try and get employment of some sort, and with what you earn and the hundred a year poor papa left me, we shall jog along very comfortably, no doubt. It shan't be my fault if we don't. And now, dear Peter,' said my brave Bessie, 'there's one thing I must ask you to promise me, and I know that if you give me your word you'll keep it.'

'I think I can guess what it is, Bessie,' replied I; 'but you shall have your wish, whatever it is.'

'Well,' said Bessie, 'I want you to say you will give up betting for the future. I'm afraid it's a hard thing to ask; but will you, Peter? You'll make me so happy if you will.'

Well, gentlemen, I don't mind confessing that it was rather a hard nut to crack, but I gave my word, as Bessie wished, and, what is more, I kept it. I never made another bet, gentlemen.

'What! Never?' inquired young Pluggit, the tobacconist, who was reckoned a bit of a wag, thinking to get a rise out of the old man.

'No, sir—never!' replied Mr. Grounsell, looking sternly for exactly a minute and a half at the now abashed joker. 'If my word is not considered good enough,' continued the poor old man, his voice quavering as he spoke, addressing the company generally, 'perhaps I had better not say any more.'

But up rose a babel of voices, with 'Yes, yes! Go on, Mr. Grounsell; it's all right. Never you mind Pluggit—he's nobody, he ain't.'

And the old gentleman, evidently well satisfied, with a triumphant glance at the defeated Pluggit, cocked his hat on one side with the air of a conqueror, refilled his pipe, replenished his glass, and once more resumed his story:

Well, gentlemen, true to my promise, I knocked off betting for good and all, though it was a wrench, gentlemen, it was indeed—just like having a tooth out, in fact; and I sought for and obtained employment as a clerk in a large counting-house in the City, so that

what with my screw and my wife's hundred a year we were able to jog along, if not in affluence, at all events in comfort. Not only that, there was Uncle Zachary. Uncle Zach, as we always called him, was a brother of my wife's late father, and had always lived with him until the latter's death, and, being a very old man, over eighty, indeed, and not liking to leave him to take care of himself, my soft-hearted Bessie proposed that we should offer him a home and take care of him. The poor old man gladly accepted the offer, and, as he possessed an annuity of seventy-five pounds, it was arranged between us that he should pay us forty out of it for his board and lodging.

He was a harmless old man enough, his one failing being a weakness for drink.

This failing was, on the whole, a very great nuisance to us, for not only was it unsafe to leave any wines or spirits about in the house, but one never felt certain, when the old gentleman took his walks abroad, that he would not return in an advanced stage of inebriation, escorted by a mob of jeering boys, if he did return at all. I say 'if' advisedly, for not seldom on returning from my day's work in the City, tired and hungry, I would be informed that our aged relative was detained in durance vile in a cell at the police-station, waiting for me to bail him out, he having been escorted there in the course of the afternoon by one of the force, who had picked him up in a comatose state on the pavement.

On these occasions the old man, on being brought home, would cry piteously, and make all sorts of promises to my wife never to so forget himself again,

which, of course, he never did until next time, which was generally about a week hence.

At last Uncle Zachary got so very disreputable in his habits that Bessie and I both agreed that we could stand it no longer, so, catching our troublesome relative one day in one of his sober moments, we put it clearly that it must be one of two things for the future, either he must give us sole control over his money, and submit, when he went out for a walk, to have his pocket-money restricted to the amount of sixpence, or, as the only other alternative, he must take himself off from our house, and for the future get someone else to look after him.

This conversation had the desired effect, the poor old man tearfully expressing himself willing to submit to any arrangement we were pleased to make sooner than leave his dear Bessie and her good husband, as he was pleased to term me. After this things went on more comfortably, as may be imagined. Uncle Zach invariably returned from his constitutional as sober as a judge. The poor old fellow was gradually getting very childish in all his ways, and had got a great idea in his head, which was to go out to Australia and start sheep-farming, and for this purpose he bought a money-box; and very often, instead of spending his magnificent allowance in drink, would pop it into his private savings bank, to go towards the expenses of his journey to the Antipodes. Needless to say, we encouraged him in his notion. Well, things were going swimmingly with us. Our little girl was a perfect treasure; my wife, free from anxiety on my account, was, she declared, the happiest woman in England;

our big baby, as she called Uncle Zach, was behaving himself beautifully; and, lastly, to make things still more cheerful, I got a rise in my salary one fine day.

It was quite unexpected; and before I went home that night I thought, under the circumstances, I was quite justified in buying a present of some sort as a souvenir of the occasion for the dear ones at home. So accordingly I made my little purchase, and then, feeling rather tired after my exertions in the shopping line, I turned into a certain busy hostelry situated in a little street off the Strand, that I had been wont to use a good deal in former days, and ordered a modest glass of brandy-and-water, intending, as soon as I had swallowed it, to take the omnibus home.

'What, Mr. Grounsell!' suddenly exclaimed a jolly voice; 'it's never you, sure-ly? Why, I thought you was dead and buried long ago. Come inside, sir—come in and have a glass and smoke and a chat over old times.'

The jolly voice was that of mine host of the Grapes, Sam Stebbing by name, as cheery a soul, gentlemen, as ever laid a winner or cracked a bottle with a boon companion. Sam, besides his regular business, always had a book on the principal events of the year, and in the old days he and I had had many a bet together.

Nothing now would satisfy him but a bottle of champagne, 'For,' quoth he, 'we don't come across such an old friend as you every day in the week,' and, as I was nothing loth, down we sat accordingly.

'Well,' said my jolly host, after we had compared notes, 'and so you have given up backing horses, eh?

Well, perhaps you're wise. I, for one, don't blame you. You see, the difference between the backer and the layer is this: Whereas the former only has one or two running for him, the latter has the whole field, perhaps five-and-twenty or thirty: therefore it stands to reason he's bound to have the best of it in the long-run —that's only common-sense, that is. I tell you what, though,' continued the voluble Sam, 'though you've made a vow to the missus to give up backing 'em, I don't see why you shouldn't have a shy at my big Derby Lottery. Five hundred members at a pound each. Four hundred clear to the winner, and the rest divided between second and third. There are only about twenty chances left, and it's drawn next week. Come now, Mr. G., let me sell you a ticket, just for once.'

Well, gentlemen, I was not proof against Sam's persuasive powers; and as I had had such a good day, I did not see why I shouldn't have a bit of fun on my own account once in a way, so accordingly I handed my host a sovereign, and, having chosen No. 453, received a duplicate ticket in exchange. And by this time, the bottle of champagne being finished, I bade a cordial farewell to Sam Stebbing, and walked off to get the bus for Hampstead.

Great was the rejoicing at home at the good news I brought. The presents were distributed, the lottery ticket discussed, and we were intensely happy, the lot of us, including poor old Uncle Zach, who smoked the new pipe I had bought him with great delight. The old man was allowed an extra glass of grog that night, too, in honour of the occasion; 'And I tell you what it

is, Uncle Zach,' said I, the last thing that night, 'if Bessie will let us, you and I will go to the Grapes next Monday night, and between us see if we can't draw the favourite in the Derby Lottery. So we will.'

I need scarcely tell you, gentlemen, that Uncle Zach was uncommon keen to go, and, having obtained Bessie's consent, it was arranged that the old man should call for me at the office at five o'clock; we would then go and have a chop somewhere, and adjourn to the Grapes afterwards.

Well, gentlemen, to make a long story short, it may seem incredible to you, but it was true, nevertheless, when at the drawing of the lottery my number—453—was called out, the horse that corresponded to it was none other than Jeremy Diddler, the first favourite for the Derby.

No sooner was the lucky number drawn than I got offers on all sides to purchase. 'My tear,' whispered one old Jew, taking me on one side, 'I don't think the 'orse will vin myself, but, just by vay of a speculation, I'll give you a hundred for your chance.'

But I shook my head to all of them. Finally, the most persistent bidder of any of them pulled out two notes for a hundred each. 'There,' said he; 'that's the amount I'm prepared to give for Jeremy Diddler. And in case you should change your mind, sir, before the day,' he continued, addressing me, 'I shall leave these notes with Mr. Stebbing, to hand over to you in exchange for the lottery ticket, should you wish to dispose of it.'

But no; I determined not to sell at any price. Jeremy Diddler was a firm favourite, and the general

opinion was that he was bound to win. In short, I looked upon the four hundred pounds as already in my pocket.

Uncle Zach, on the contrary, was not at all of my opinion.

'Oh, why didn't you sell? Why didn't you sell?' he kept saying on his way home, making one feel quite irritable, I can assure you. And the last thing, as he took his candle and said good-night, he began again: 'Oh, why didn't you sell? If it had been mine, I'd have taken the money and gone to Australia to-morrow with it.'

'No, no, uncle,' said I; 'I'll win the lot or nothing.' And so saying, I put away the lottery ticket then and there in an old desk that was in the room, and that done went to bed and dreamed that Jeremy Diddler won the Derby by ten lengths. Well, the Derby Day came in due course, and I gave a sigh as I saw what a heavenly day it was, and thought how much pleasanter it would be enjoying one's self on the Downs than stewing in a fusty office. However, it was no use kicking against the pricks, and so off I went as usual, Uncle Zach, in a suppressed state of excitement, for some reason or other, accompanying me, he being anxious to get to the west end of the town in good time, so as to feast his old eyes on the various equipages, all full of holiday-makers, starting for Epsom. Needless to say, I was rather flustered and anxious myself all day, as who would not be with a sum like four hundred pounds trembling in the balance? It was not until nearly five o'clock that we got the news in the City (the electric telegraph not being in use in those days),

the result that Jeremy Diddler had come in second. 'Oh, come,' thought I, rubbing my hands, 'that's not so bad, after all! I've won sixty pounds, at all events!'

And once more I started for home with a light heart, having previously purchased an extra fine lobster for supper (Bessie was particularly fond of lobster) by way of celebrating the event.

Great was the rejoicing at home at my good luck, and I went straight to the desk where I had placed the ticket a week ago, just to gloat over it, as it were. You can imagine my disgust and consternation when, after rummaging the desk from top to bottom, I could see nothing of it.

'Where on earth can it be?' gasped I.

'Who can have taken it?' whispered Bessie. We were standing just like two stuck pigs, not knowing what to do, when a thundering knock at the front door made the pair of us jump nearly out of our skins, and put an end—for the present, at all events—to all speculation as to the whereabouts of the missing ticket.

I went to the front door myself. It was a policeman. ('Uncle Zach drunk again, for a hundred,' I thought to myself.)

'Is your name Mr. Grounsell, sir?' asked the officer.

'It is,' replied I.

''Ave you a helderly gent living 'ere name o' Zachary Brown?'

'Yes,' said I; 'he's an uncle of ours, and who, I'm sorry to say, policeman, is in the habit of taking a little too much occasionally. I suppose he's at the station as usual, eh?'

'Well, no, he isn't,' replied the man. 'I don't think

the old gent's drunk and incapable this time. As I understand, he was picked up in the street by our men, and took to the station, and the divisional surgeon, when he sees him, gives orders that he was to be sent to the 'orspital immediate; so he was took there, and on searching of 'im they found a large sum of money in bank-notes and this here address, and I was directed by the inspector on dooty to come here and give information to the pore old party's fambly.'

And having said his say, the police officer wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, as much as to say talking's dry work in summer-time, and, removing his helmet, mopped his brow with a red handkerchief, and remarked that it was an 'ot night, and that he thought it likely there would be thunder before long.

Taking this as a hint, I called for a jug of beer, and requested the policeman to sit down for a moment whilst I went upstairs to get ready to accompany him to the hospital.

Arrived at that institution, I ascertained that I was only just in time, the poor old man's death being immediately expected.

He had fallen down in a fit in the street, the doctor informed me, it being probably brought on by drink and excitement, accelerated by the extreme heat of the day. It was lucky, remarked the doctor, that the police got hold of him as soon as they did, as in the breast-pocket of his coat were two bank-notes of one hundred pounds each, which notes were now detained by the police, and would no doubt be handed to me in due course.

He then escorted me to Uncle Zach's bedside, to

which I arrived just in time to hear him speak for the last time.

'God bless you, my dear boy,' said Uncle Zach. 'I'm glad you've come to say good-bye. I'm just off to Aus —Australia.' And then poor, weak, disreputable old Uncle Zach died.

Having made all necessary arrangements for the funeral, etc., I left the hospital, and, feeling low and depressed, called in at the Grapes, thinking a glass of something would pick me up and put a bit of life into me.

That hostelry, lively at all times, I found a trifle more so than usual to-night, it being full of sporting cits just back from Epsom, among them Sam Stebbing, the proprietor, heartier than ever after his day on the Surrey Downs.

'Well, and so you thought better of it, after all, and collared the two hundred!' shouted he in his boisterous way. 'Knew something, eh? You were quite right; the favourite couldn't stay, after all. When,' he continued, 'that jolly old uncle of yours turned up early this morning, only just in time (for in five minutes I should have started), and, handing me your ticket, asked for the notes, I said to myself: "I knew he would; I felt certain all along Mr. Grounsell wasn't such a flat as to refuse such a good offer as that." You ought to stand something, Mr. G., for the good of the house—I'm blessed if you oughtn't!'

'Sam, my boy,' said I in reply, shaking him heartily by the hand, 'I'll stand champagne all round to any extent you like. You're quite right; I got the "tip" at the very last moment that the horse couldn't stay,

and that's why it was I parted with the lottery ticket.'

Sam took me at my word, and—and I don't precisely know how I got home that night, gentlemen. But this I do know, which is, that when the undertaker called on me next morning with reference to the arrangements for poor old Zach's funeral, I bade him spare no expense whatever, but to do the whole thing in his very best style.

'Yes,' thought I to myself, as I felt the notes which Uncle Zach had obtained in exchange for my lottery ticket rustling pleasantly in my waistcoat pocket, 'one good turn deserves another.'

I put into Sam's Derby lottery steadily every year for a long while after, gentlemen, but I never had another turn of luck, I'm sorry to say.

A RACE FOR A WIFE

THE FARMER'S STORY

To hunt with my lord's hounds, and not to know that fine, ruddy-faced specimen of the British yeoman, commonly called John Dixon, of Crabtree Farm, would indeed have been strange.

In his younger days he was by all accounts the recognised 'bruiser' of the hunt, and even now, though he must have swung a good nineteen stone into the saddle every time he mounted his horse, he was generally there or thereabouts at the finish, no matter how good a thing it was. An intimate knowledge of every field, fence, and gate in the country, of course, helped him to a great extent, and fond papas and mammas, well aware of this fact, would carefully instruct their offspring on hunting mornings, to be sure, directly the hounds formed, to stick to Old John. And as the jolly farmer was good-nature personified, and fond of children to a degree, you would be sure to see him when the hounds went away making for a point, surrounded by a whole bevy of little masters and misses of different ages, all mounted on ponies of various

degrees of stature, reminding one somewhat of a hawk when he is being followed by a lot of small birds.

John Dixon, in fact, was a very great card, not only in the hunt but in the county generally. Like all great men he had his enemies, of course, but on the whole he was extraordinarily popular with the majority, especially with the gentry. Needless to say, that on market-day at Barleyford Old John was always very much *en evidence*, and he invariably made a point of ending the day with a long sitting at the Horse-shoe Club, of which institution he was one of the original members, and upon his arrival in the club-room was always greeted with applause by the company.

When called on by the chairman for a song, Old John, nothing loth, always responded with one of the only two songs in his repertoire, which were respectively, 'Jockey to the Fair,' and 'The Farmer's Boy.' I think I can see and hear him now, as, in reply to the encore he invariably got, his jolly face crimson from the effects of his vocal efforts, aided probably by the amount of brandy-and-water he had consumed during the day, he, in stentorian tones that might almost have been heard in the next parish, and certainly were in the next street, led the chorus of one of the afore-mentioned favourite ditties.

For two consecutive Saturdays (Saturday was market-day at Barleyford) I had had the pleasure of hearing 'Jockey to the Fair,' and 'The Farmer's Boy' issue forth from the powerful lungs of old John, and I anticipated doing so again when the third Saturday came round. However, to my and everybody else's great

astonishment, the worthy farmer, on being requested to oblige, as usual, replied with:

'I've noticed, Mr. Chairman and gentlemen all, that several of the members of this cloob, instead of a singing a song, as they always used to do, have taken to the stoory-tellin' business instead. Now, I never was beat by any mon yet, 'xcept once, and that was at Bonnyfield Fair years agoo, when I took on a prize-fighter by mistake, and a nice dressing he gave me, I can tell ee, and I don't intend to be beat now by any o' you chaps, so dang me if I don't give you a bit of a yarn, and we'll see if you like it as well as "Jockey to the Fair."

'The circumstance,' added John, 'which I am goin' to tell ee about is strictly true, for I was there, and saw it all with my own eyes. So Bob, my lad, if you'll just order me another glass of brandy-and-water, and a fresh cigar, I'll begin at once.'

Tremendous applause greeting this speech from all parts of the room, John Dixon, having lit his cigar and taken a hearty pull at his brandy-and-water, forthwith commenced the following story:

It was just three years ago, in the spring-time, that my wife and me left the farm to take care of itself for a few days, whilst we went to pay a visit to our only girl in Buttercupshire. She had been married only a little over a year to young Tom Rooster, and had just presented him with a son and heir ('hare' the worthy yeoman pronounced it), and nothing would content her and Tom but that me and her mother must come to the christening and stand godfather and godmother. It

was not a bit o' use my grumbling, or, rather, pretending to grumble—for, blessee, I was anxious to go, and meant to all the while—and saying that I couldn't possibly leave the farm just then, because of the lambs, and so on. Come we must, says she in her letters. If we didn't, says she, the child shouldn't be christened at all, and should go all his life without a name, just like some of the racehorses we read about sometimes, that they call the colt by something or other.

'We must go, John, that's very certain,' said my wife, 'or else the dear little child will grow up a Dissenter or a Plymouth Brother, or something worse.'

So, of course, we went, and a gay time we had of it the week we was there.

'Well, dear father and mother, you couldn't have come at a better time to see me,' said our Polly, as we sat at tea the evening we got there, all as merry as crickets and talking all of us sixteen to the dozen. 'You couldn't have come at a better time,' says she, 'could they, Tom? for there's going to be a race the day after to-morrow between a lot of the farmers here, all friends of Tom's, and over our farm, too, for a prize, the like of which I don't believe has ever been heard of before. Guess what it is, father!' exclaimed Polly. 'But there, you'll never guess if you tried for a week, so I'll tell you what it is. A wife, father! Just think of it! A wife!' And Polly clapped her hands together with glee at the bare notion.

'A wife!' we both exclaimed in astonishment, 'why, you can't mean it, Polly, sure-lie?'

'Indeed I do though, father,' replied she. 'Just wait

a minute whilst I pour out some tea, and I'll tell you all about it.'

Well, it appeared by Polly's account that there was a young girl in these parts, one of the prettiest young girls that ever was seen, so much so that all the young chaps in the neighbourhood was all in love with her, all at once, and was a-quarrelling and fighting amongst themselves which was to have her in a way as you'd scarcely believe. Not that it was so very extraordinary after all, for, as I remarked to Polly at the time, I well remembered getting more than one broken head whilst I was courting her dear mother. But that's neither here nor there.

Nelly Roberts—that was the name of this little friend of our Polly's—it appears, had a head on her shoulders as well as a pretty face, and being tired of all the squabbling and bickering that was going on amongst all her admirers (though between you and me, gentlemen, I dare say she approved of it all in her heart of hearts—they all of 'em do, bless you! if you only knew), hit upon a dodge at last to put an end to it all that I think, whatever you do, was as clever a one as ever was heard of. It was nothing more than this. She was a great horsewoman, I must tell you, and used to break all her father's young horses for him. A five-year-old, so they told me, that had carried Nelly Roberts, even in a quick thing or two, was always worth his three hundred.

So one fine day she up and says, says she: 'Look here! The man that wants to marry me must be able to ride better than his fellows, or I'm blessed if I have anything to say to him.' (I don't say that she put

it in those exact words, but that was her meaning, any way.)

So says she: 'Supposing you all have a steeplechase, four miles and a half over a fair hunting country, point to point, and the man that comes in first shall take me to church as soon as he likes.'

Lord bless ye! they all of 'em rose at the idea, just like so many trout at a fly, and the affair getting wind, their was such excitement over it as you never heard of in all your born days.

Directly Lord Beaupré, the nobleman as kept the hounds (Nelly's father, I must tell you, rented one of his largest farms), heard of it, he rode over specially to see her, and not only promised her that he would send his huntsman and whippers-in to keep the course, but announced his intention of providing lunch for all comers, and, what was best of all, giving a fifty-guinea cup to the winner of the steeplechase—make a regular county affair of it, in fact. Oh, he was a good sort was Lord Beaupré, gentlemen, and here's his jolly good health and wishing there was a few more like him in the country! The very next day was the christening, and amongst the guests invited was this very Nelly Roberts whose name was in everybody's mouth just then, on account of the steeplechase which was to come off the day following. And a nice, bright, pretty young thing she was, too, as ever I saw in my life. She and me were quite old friends before we had known each other half an hour. And her old father, quite one of the right sort, too, I can tell you—a man after my own heart, in fact, altogether. I very soon found out we had tastes in common, and both of



us, I fear, liked a bit of coursin' and huntin' better than the farm. Well, pretty Nelly got a nice lot of chaff at dinner that day, you may depend, and right well she stood it, too; always had an answer ready, bless you!

'And who do you think will win to-morrow, Nelly?' inquired my daughter Polly. 'Who do you *hope* will win?' I heard her add in a whisper, the cunning young hussy!

'Well, I fancy Frank Selby myself,' replied Nelly, trying to look calm and self-possessed, but blushing as red as a rose all the same. 'He's the best horseman of the lot,' says she, 'and, what is more, will be better mounted than the rest. Kate Kearney, that chestnut five-year-old of his that he bred and is going to ride, father says is quite the best in these parts—don't you, father? Frank could have sold her the last day the hounds were out, but he wanted to keep her specially for the race to-morrow. Yes,' said Nelly absently, as if talking to herself, and heaving a sigh, 'I hope Frank will win.'

There was a general nudging of elbows and an interchange of significant looks amongst the company at the remark, and poor little Nelly, suddenly alive to the fact that she was the cause of merriment, blushed away, until her cheeks were more the colour of a red, red rose than ever.

Oh, we didn't spare her, I can tell you, and, upon my word! if I don't think she was downright glad when the time came for her to go.

'One thing is very certain,' said she, firing up and addressing her father, who had been chaffing her more than any of us, 'and that is, if Frank don't win, your friend old Mr. Sharp won't.'

Old Mr. Sharp, I was informed afterwards, being the best-off farmer in that part of the county and one of Nelly's most ardent admirers, had in consequence been encouraged in his suit by old Roberts, who would have liked such a rich son-in-law for his girl despite his age, and was, in fact, much put about because she would have nothing to say to him.

'I will bet any amount of gloves against the silly old man!' she exclaimed defiantly.

'Oh, don't you be too sure, Nelly,' replied her father; 'though he's close on sixty years of age, old George's nerve is just as good as ever it was, and, what is more, let me tell you he knows more about steeplechase riding than Frank Selby or any of 'em. Why, they tell me the way he went in that fast thing after my lord's hounds soon after Christmas, from Goodman's Gorse, was perfectly astonishing! No, no; don't you count your chickens before they're hatched. If I don't see old George and his grey horse in front when they come to the last fence from home, I shall be very much surprised, and that's all about it.'

'Horrid old man!' exclaimed my daughter Polly, alluding to the absent Mr. Sharp, when Mr. Roberts and his daughter had departed. 'I only hope he'll fall and break his nasty old neck. Just fancy if he won and poor little Nelly had to marry him! Oh, it would be too dreadful!'

'Indeed it would be a shame!' exclaimed another sympathizing young lady present.

In fact, we all agreed that it was absurd to think for a moment of such a contingency. If poor old George Sharp could have heard the things we said about him,

not only would his ears have tingled, but I think he'd have felt fit to go and hang himself. We talked of nothing but of the race that night, you may be sure, and before we went to bed we had all made up our minds—at all events, the women had—that it *must* be won by Frank Selby and no one else.

'And, dear heart alive!' exclaimed my girl Polly, as she took her candle to go to bed, 'what a handsome couple Frank and Nelly *will* make, to be sure!'

Well, the next morning broke bright and fine, and the house was astir earlier than usual, for, as I think I told you, gentlemen, the 'Race for a Wife' was to take place over part of my son-in-law's farm, and that meant plenty of company during the day, as you may imagine. Company! There was some company, I can tell you. I never saw such a lot of people got together in my life for a county affair. Not only farmers and such like, either, but quality folk as well. The noble master, in fact, had helped to choose the ground himself, and was one of the first arrivals on to the course, and a fine company of ladies and gentlemen he brought with him, too, on his coach.

Oh, but he's one of the right sort, is my lord! 'We're all coming in to ask you to give us a cup o' tea after the race, Mrs. Rooster,' he calls out to my daughter Polly, as, spying her out, he takes off his hat to her just as if she was a duchess. The race of the day was set for three o'clock, but as early as eleven the county folks began to put in an appearance. There were two other races and a match, however, before the great event, so that they had plenty to amuse them between whiles. To keep up the excitement, too, there

was a fight or so in the course of the morning, and finally they got hold of two of those 'three-card chaps'—you know the sort I mean, I dare say, gentlemen—and soused 'em in the horse-pond in the corner of the field, until the poor devils were half drowned. Such a sight as they were when they came out you never saw, for the pond was quite covered with duckweed and very muddy. Three o'clock came at last, and tolerably up to time the ten competitors for my lord's silver cup and the hand of pretty Nelly Roberts got weighed out (the weighing took place in my son-in-law's barn, and the judge's box was one of his waggons, so you may see the arrangements were quite homely like)—thirteen stun each of 'em had to carry—and, getting on their horses, proceeded to the starting-point, led by his lordship, who was to start 'em. They had to make the best of their way to Little Marley Church, then turn, and make for home, finishing in the same field they started from.

They were all young chaps, with the exception of old George Sharp, and a good-looking lot as ever you saw, and got up in their sprucest clothes, you may depend.

They were admirably mounted, too, especially Frank Selby, whose beautiful mare excited the admiration of everybody on the course.

To my mind, though, the most business-like-looking of all of them was old Mr. Sharp. The way he sat his horse—an old-fashioned-looking grey, with a goose rump and just about the best shoulders you ever saw—and his self-possessed, confident manner, so different to the flurried, excited appearance the other nine wore, impressed me very favourably with his chance.

'If I was betting,' thought I, 'you'd be the one I should back.'

And, as luck would have it, a mounted gentleman at that moment offering Mr. Sharp in my hearing thirty to five against his winning, which the old gentleman promptly took, I approached the amateur bookmaker on my own account, and inquired if he was inclined to go on at the price.

'Yes, I don't mind,' replied he; 'just to another fiver.'

'Done with you, then,' said I, booking the bet.

In another minute my lord had started them, and away they went at a great pace, Frank Selby making the running and the veteran waiting on the lot of them.

My son-in-law's farm lay high, so that we could see them some distance; then they disappeared from our view for a bit, and the excitement was simply tremendous until they came into sight again. When they did appear, there were only four of them in it, foremost among the quartette being Frank Selby and that horrid old wretch on his grey, as my daughter called poor old Sharp, both going strong and well, the latter especially, I thought.

Three fences from home down came two of them, the horse of one of them not rising. Cries go up from the crowd that it is Charlie Robinson and Ned Brown of the Lea who have fallen.

'Ned's hurt, too, I reckon,' says someone, as the rider in question is seen sitting on the grass, leaning his head in his hand.

But everybody is too engrossed with the finish to take

much heed of the fallen, and as the old man on the grey and the young one on the chestnut are seen approaching the last fence, neck and neck, everybody holds his or her breath. Up they both rise in the air, their stirrup-irons almost touching, if not quite, and both land safe and sound.

Then came the final tussle, and a rare tussle it was. I've seen a goodish many dead-heats in my time, gentlemen—Buckstone and Tim Whiffler, Moslem and Formosa, Harvester and St. Gatien—but never—no, never did I ever see such excitement over a dead-heat as this, for that was how this particular race ended.

The pair fought every inch of ground from the last fence to the winning-post—or, rather, waggon—their two jockeys simply riding like demons, the crowd encouraging them with deafening shouts of 'The grey wins!' 'No, the mare—the mare!' 'It's the old man, I tell ee!' 'I says it's young Frank!' You never heard such a row.

According to my judgment Frank ought to have won, and I am certain nothing but old George Sharp's patient riding and splendid finish brought him where he was. At all events, my lord said he could not separate them, and no one disputed his verdict of a dead-heat—in fact, his decision met with a general approval, especially amongst the yokels, they fully expecting that they would have the pleasure of looking on at another race between the pair.

To run it over again that day was, of course, out of the question. Meanwhile, everybody followed the two horses and their riders to the barn to weigh in and to hear what decision the two intended to come to. I

followed my son-in-law in, as I was curious as any of 'em, bless you! They got into the scale—the old man first and George after him. 'All right' in each case.

'And now,' said my lord, who was there superintending everything, glancing, with a twinkle in his eye, at poor little Nelly Roberts, who was standing there as pale as death, looking ready to faint, and leaning on my girl Polly's arm, she herself being pretty nigh as white about the gills as her friend—'and now, what are you two fellows going to do? You can't both marry the lady, that's clear. Are you going to have it all over again, or what?'

Old George Sharp glanced at young Frank Selby, and young Frank Selby glanced at old George Sharp.

'You settle which way 'tis to be, then, Mr. Sharp,' says Frank, looking sheepish. 'You are the oldest. I leave it to you.'

'You'll leave it to me, will you, lad?' said old George, squaring his shoulders, and speaking up like a man. 'Then this is what I propose, and if my lord approves of it, so it shall be: As his lordship says, we can't both marry pretty Nelly there, and we can't cut her in two like King Solomon proposed to do the babby when its ma came and asked him to arbitrate between her and another lady. So,' said old George, raising his voice so that everybody should hear, 'what I propose is this: You shall have Nelly, and I'll take the cup. What say you?'

Oh, you should have heard the cheers that greeted the old man's speech! I thought the old barn would have come down, they made such a row. There was my girl Polly, who two minutes before had been

abusing the old man like a pickpocket, hugging him round the neck until he was nearly throttled; there was Nelly doing ditto to Frank. Everybody was shaking hands with everybody else; the women were all crying, of course, and I——

Well, I had been doing a bit in the shouting line myself, and was that thirsty I didn't know what to do, so I made tracks into the house, and it was a good long draught that I took before I put down the tankard of ale that I found on the sideboard, you may depend.

I think old George Sharp behaved like a trump, don't you, gentlemen?

But I fancy, you know, that if it had been me, I should have wanted another ride before giving up such a pretty girl as Nelly Roberts. However, everyone knows his own business best, and it is to be presumed Mr. Sharp knew his. He was old enough, anyhow.

The joke of it was that the gentleman who laid me the bet against the grey came over to my son-in-law's farm the next day on purpose to pay me, and when my girl Polly heard that I had been and gone and backed old George's mount, what do you think she said? Why, that I ought to be thoroughly well ashamed of myself! Just like a woman, wasn't it?



BY THE LIGHT OF THE MOON

THE SUPERINTENDENT'S STORY

No need to ask who the stalwart specimen of humanity is who walks into the club-room one Saturday night, and after exchanging greetings of a cordial description with the assembled company, and calling for a pipe and a glass of something comfortable—for it is a bitter cold night—takes a chair at the long table with the air of a man who, having done a good day's work, feels thoroughly justified in going in for a little mild dissipation.

The uniform he wears is that of one high in office in the police force, and the members of the Horse-shoe Club address him as Mr. Brown. In short, he is Chief Superintendent of Police for the town of Barleyford; very much respected, so I was informed, and I should say, judging by the cordial greeting he received on his entry into the club-room, a very popular character as well.

He was a fine, soldierly-looking man, with a face that would have been decidedly handsome but for a hideous scar that extended from eye to chin right down one

side of his face. I could not help mentioning this to Bob Magnum, by whose side, as usual, I was seated.

'Ah,' replied Bob, with the air of a connoisseur in such matters, 'it is an ugly mark, ain't it? However, the inspector had his revenge on the chap that gave it to him, and not so very long ago, neither. It's quite a story, it is, and, what's more, Mr. Brown shall tell it this very evening, or my name ain't Bob Magnum. As to that, between you and me and the post, sir,' whispered Bob, 'he don't want much pressin', for we all know "revenge is sweet," and in this case it was especially so.'

True to his word, later on in the evening Bob Magnum, in his capacity of chairman, called on Mr. Brown for a song or story, and the worthy inspector, expressing his willingness to oblige, commenced forthwith the following narrative:

I dare say, gentlemen, said the inspector, you may some of you have noticed this cicatrice that I have got to wear for life all down one side of my face. The party that left his mark upon me, you will be happy to hear, gentlemen, will never get a chance of doing the like again either to me or anybody else—that is, unless he manages to break out of Portland some fine night, and I don't think that's very likely—for at this present time he is undergoing his sentence of penal servitude for life—a sentence which I am proud to say I was the means of his obtaining. If you will allow me, I will tell you all about it from beginning to end, commencing from when I became the possessor of the bit of ornamenta-



tion you see here (the inspector pointed with his finger as he spoke to the mark upon his face).

It was just after I joined the force, some sixteen years ago, and I was the one policeman allotted to the little village of Cloverly in this county. I am not aware, gentlemen, if any of you know the place, but if you don't, I can only say it's the quietest spot you ever came near. Nobody ever went wrong in Cloverly, bless you! from one year's end to the other. Oh, they *were* a respectable lot! It was pleasant enough in some respects, I am bound to admit, and as the place was a sinecure, as you might say, as far as hard work was concerned, and I had a young and pretty wife, a family cropping up around me, and a snug cottage to live in, with a nice bit of garden attached to it, I dare say you will say I had no cause for grumbling. I was not idle either, for I did a very fair little business in the bird-stuffing line round about, I having, when a boy, been apprenticed to a bird-stuffer and learned the trade. If anybody, from the Squire downwards, ever wanted a bird or a dog or a pet of any sort preserved, I was always given the job, you may depend. Not only that, but I had a few fancy fowls, and made a good deal of money in that way of business.

With all these advantages, you'll say I ought to have been happy and contented. But I was not, gentlemen, for all that. I'll tell you why: I was ambitious; that's where it was—I was ambitious. I longed to distinguish myself in my professional calling. But if nobody would go wrong, how could I?

'Oh, Mary,' I used to say to my wife sometimes—'oh, Mary, how I wish there would be a jolly good

murder down in these parts, just to give a chap a chance, like!'

'Robert,' she would reply, 'I'm ashamed of you! I call it downright sinful to talk like that! Whatever would Mr. Simpson (that was our Vicar, gentlemen) say if he heard you?'

Well, I had been some five years at Cloverly, and there I was getting as fat as a pig from sheer contentedness, I verily believe. I don't think anybody but the most irritable man in existence could have been anything but fat living the lazy life I did.

You'll hardly believe it, gentlemen, but during all those five years I only arrested two people. One was a tramp for going to sleep in Farmer Binfield's barn and nearly setting it alight with his pipe, and the other was a little boy of eight years old for stealing turnips.

Lord! how everybody laughed as I led the poor little chap, blubbering with all his might, you may depend, through the village!

'Shame!' cried the women (including my wife, if you please).

'Put the handcuffs on the desperate young willin, Mr. Brown, or he might murder you,' sung out young Frank Simcox, of Crabtree Farm, the sauciest young chap in those parts, getting what he wanted—a general laugh from the villagers at his silly chaff.

Then one began and then another. Oh, I was that wild at last I didn't know what to do, I can tell you!

Well, gentlemen, one hot summer afternoon I had been grumbling to my wife most tremendous over my enforced inactivity; she, good soul! unknowingly making

me worse instead of better by telling me in reply that I ought to be glad instead of repining that there was such an absence of crime in the district, and such-like nonsense, until at last I remarked savagely that, unless something turned up soon to enable me to distinguish myself, I had made up my mind to apply for other quarters.

'What! You would give up your happy home and peaceful life merely because there are not enough wicked people already in the world? Oh, Robert, you can't mean it! Say you don't mean it!' exclaimed my wife in tears.

'I do mean it, though,' I replied sternly. 'Mark my words, Mary, my dear, I'll give you a week from now, and if nothing of an exciting nature turns up within that time, off I go from this dead-alive hole—you just see if I don't!'

And with that I went indoors for my usual afternoon nap before I started on my rounds at night.

I had my sleep—dreaming in the course of it, I recollect, that I had captured five burglars single-handed, and was promoted in consequence—and about nine o'clock donned my uniform as usual and sallied forth for my uneventful prowl. It was the end of July, and a great many of the gentlefolk round about were away: some at the sea, others gone abroad, and so on. Of course, I went through the usual farce of marching round their premises. Sir John Ricketts' place, all right as usual; Major Plumper's, where I found the servants having a little dance amongst themselves on the lawn, the footman playing a polka on the concertina for them to foot it to. I joined in for half an hour, I remember,

and enjoyed myself very much, though I found my uniform rather heavy. Three other houses I visited afterwards, and I wound up at Rosebud Cottage, a sweet little place on the highroad, belonging to a retired naval officer, old Captain Caulker. I had been specially requested by the Captain to give an eye to his premises of a night during his absence, as his one servant had gone for a holiday, and the house was shut up with no one to look after it. So what was my surprise when I arrived opposite to it, at about half-past eleven o'clock, to see a light burning in one of the downstair rooms. I could see it distinctly through the chinks of the shutters. My heart beat sixteen to the dozen at the sight, I can tell you. 'Burglary, for a hundred!' exclaimed I to myself under my breath. 'Bobby, my boy, your opportunity's been a long while coming, but it's come at last!' What to do, was the next thing to think about. The front-door, I could see, was shut close, and as it could only be opened from the inside I knew it was no use my trying to get in that way. My only chance, therefore, was at the back; and accordingly, having previously taken the precaution of pulling off my boots, away I crept on tip-toe, keeping well on the grass, round to the rear of the house. Hurrah! the back-door was open. The burglar, it was clear, had entered that way. I knew my way well, for I had been in the house scores of times. There was a green-baize door opening from the back premises into the hall, and having first lit a candle which I found on a ledge by the back-door, I crept softly towards it. It didn't creak, for a wonder, and in another second I was in the front-hall, and was confronted directly I got



there by a stream of light which came from the open door of the Captain's study, which was exactly opposite.

Crossing the hall on tip-toe, I peeped cautiously in, and there seated in the old officer's huge armchair, and drinking rum from a large case bottle, I beheld one of the ugliest men I ever set eyes on. Not content with a squint, his nose had been at some time or another knocked right on one side, giving him a most strange appearance. He was in the act of lifting the case bottle to his lips, when his eyes suddenly caught mine. He was evidently a man of action, for in a second he had hurled the heavy decanter full at my head, which it luckily missed, and went smash into a large case full of stuffed birds—in fact, a case I myself had set up for the Captain. In another second I was upon him. Unfortunately a chair got in my way, and before I could recover myself the burglar had snatched an old naval cutlass from the wall, and as I made my grab at him, caught me the slash down my face you now see the remains of. I was deluged with blood, as you may imagine, and faint into the bargain, and I can just remember dashing the blood from my eyes in time to see the burglar bolting from the room. As he disappeared, a faintness came over my senses, and I fell all of a heap on to the floor.

I did not come to for some hours afterwards, and a nice state I was in, I can tell you, and so was the room. The first thing I observed was the smashed case of stuffed birds. The heavy bottle had knocked an owl off his perch, and was lying alongside of him at the bottom of the case. Luckily all the rum had not escaped, so I took the liberty of taking a pull, and a great deal of

good it did me. I staggered out to the front-door directly afterwards, and as some labourers I knew were passing by on their way to work (for it was just five o'clock), I called them in, and between us we put the things a bit straight, and then, locking the back-door, went out at the front. One of them I got to help me back into Cloverly, for I still felt very faint.

Of course, the man got clear off, and though the Captain, who was immediately telegraphed for, offered a handsome reward, he was never taken. Meanwhile I got great praise for my conduct, the resident gentry presenting me with a gold watch and chain as a reward for what they were pleased to call my vigilance and gallant behaviour, though, as I told them, I was only doing my duty.

'We are quite aware of that, Brown,' said Sir John Ricketts, who was spokesman on the occasion, 'and it is to remind you of the fact that we now present you with this little souvenir of the occasion. It is deeds like yours, Brown, that make us all proud of the force you belong to.'

Oh, they made quite a fuss about this little affair, I can assure you, gentlemen—far more than it deserved, in my humble opinion.

Well, shortly after, I was promoted to the rank of sergeant and removed to another station—this station, in short, and a pleasant one it is. My constant thought now was, When shall I catch a sight of 'Broken-nose' again? The chances were very considerable against that event; however, I lived in hope. 'And if ever I *do* get a chance,' I would say to myself as I looked in the glass of a morning, 'if I don't make it warm for you,

my boy, my name's not Bob Brown. It's lucky I'm married,' thought I, 'for I'm blessed if any girl would look at me with my beauty spoiled like this.'

However, it was destined that 'Broken-nose' and I were to meet again, as it happened, and not so very long after, either. And this is how it came about:

Being now a sergeant, I went my rounds of a night on horseback, my duties being to visit the men under me in the course of the night on their different beats.

There was, and is now for that matter, a good deal of night poaching in these parts, and the night patrol sometimes, when there is a fracas between the game-keepers and the poachers, if he happen to be on the spot at the right moment, is a very welcome ally—to the former, that is.

Well, one fine frosty night I was out as usual patrolling the roads. It was about one o'clock in the morning, and I had just parted with one of my men, and was making my way leisurely back to the town, when I heard a succession of shots in the direction of Sir Harry Clayton's big woods adjoining the Ilchester road.

'Hullo,' said I to myself, 'they're at it in force to-night, I'm blessed if they're not!' And without more ado I put my horse into a trot and made for the spot as quickly as I could.

By the time I got to the end of the wood the shots had ceased, but in the stillness of the night I could hear distinctly the barking of dogs and the voices of men evidently in fierce dispute. There was no end of a scrimmage going on, that was very certain. I reined in my horse close under the edge at the corner of the

wood and listened attentively. They were not a great way off, for I could distinctly hear the blows, and almost the words used, and very soon I could make out that the poachers were leaving the wood in flight, pursued by the keepers, and coming in my direction, too. I loosened my sword in its scabbard and waited, all impatience, for a view of the battle.

It was a beautiful moonlight night, just the night of all others for shooting pheasants roosting up in the trees. By-and-by I saw from my hiding-place a man jump over the fence out of the wood, and run across to an adjoining field; then another, and then another, and after him a fourth, who fell; and then two more—six in all. Next came the keepers. I heard the man on the ground shout to his pals to come to his rescue, and apparently they were not so cowardly as those gentry usually are, for I'm blessed if they did not come back to his assistance.

As there was a keeper to each man, I thought it wise to keep where I was for the present, at all events, so as to be able to pursue the poachers if any of them took to the road.

The lot closed—with the exception of one poacher, who stood aloof with his gun in his hand—and a desperate battle ensued. At last it was plain that the keepers were getting the best of it, and I was just going to shout to let them know I was at hand when the man who stood away suddenly fired his gun point-blank at a keeper who, having caught sight of him, was now making for him with a view to capture. The man fell prone to the ground, and as his slayer brought his gun down from his shoulder, and stood for a moment irreso-

lute, the rays of the moon fell right on his face. By the heavens above us! *it was the man with the broken nose!*

Not a moment did I lose now, you may be sure. I was never much of a horseman, but I shoved my nag without hesitation at the fence out of the road, and scrambled over it somehow, how I don't know, and galloped off after the poacher, who by this time was making his way across country as hard as ever his legs would carry him.

As I galloped away after him, I drew my sword from its sheath, for I meant mischief if we came to close quarters.

A large, black-looking bullfinch was in front of us, and for this he was making.

'Will he get through?' thought I, 'for if he does I'm done, that's certain.'

But no; it was too much for him, winded as he was. When he got to the ditch in front of it he turned at bay, and once more raised his gun. It was a double-barrelled one, and one hammer was down and the other raised. I could see that plainly, for, as I have said, it was almost as bright as day.

'Hands up!' shouted I, as I galloped up.

'That be damned!' yelled the desperate man in return. 'A step nearer, and I'll shoot you like a dog.'

I waited no longer, but dashed the spurs in and made for my man. A loud report rang in my ears. I felt the shot rattling all about my helmet. I saw the brute's white face mad with rage and despair as he clubbed his gun to land me a final blow if possible. The next instant my sword descended on his head,

pretty nearly in the same fashion as the old Captain's cutlass came down on mine, in the little study at Rosebud Cottage years before, and my old enemy lay bleeding and insensible on the ground.

I galloped back for help, and found all the poachers captured, and much knocked about as well. The keepers were also in sorry plight, and, saddest of all, the poor fellow who I had seen fired at—Sir Harry's head-keeper—lay stone-dead, shot through the heart.

Getting hold of the most able of the keepers, I made the best of my way to where I had left 'Broken-nose,' and found him lying just where I left him. Having ascertained that he was not dead, as I at first feared, we lifted him bodily on to my horse, and, tying him on somehow, got back to the highroad. Meanwhile, assistance came to us from a neighbouring farmhouse; a cart was sent for, and the dead man and my still insensible prisoner put into it and driven off, the former to his desolated home, the latter to the infirmary here.

Little remains to be told, gentlemen. 'Broken-nose' on his recovery was put on his trial for the wilful murder of the poor gamekeeper, and, notwithstanding that my evidence was damning enough, one would have thought, for anything, and, in addition, the judge summing up dead against him, the jury, who, it is to be presumed, did not approve of game preserving, found the prisoner merely guilty of manslaughter, to the manifest astonishment of everybody in court.

'And you may think yourself extremely lucky that the jury have taken such a merciful view of the case,' remarked the judge, with, as I thought, a somewhat



contemptuous glance at those gentry, as he sentenced the prisoner to penal servitude for the term of his natural life.

And I fancy you will all of you endorse his Lordship's opinion, gentlemen, unless I am very much mistaken; for if ever a man deserved hanging, that man was my friend 'Broken-nose.'

AN APRIL FOOL

THE HUNTSMAN'S STORY

A HUNTSMAN is invariably a popular character with the natives—at least, I never yet came across one that was not. Nay, more than that, he is an autocrat in his way. He is looked up to, in fact, as a sort of superior being whose word is 'law,' not only on matters pertaining to the chase and sporting matters generally, but on everything else, such as politics, the condition of the navy—anything, in fact, that happens to interest the public mind at the time. Tom Dalby was no exception to the rule, and was as popular with the farmers and country folk generally as he was with the members of the hunt. That he was a favourite with his brother members of the Horse-shoe Club there could be no manner of doubt, he being welcomed by everyone present in the heartiest manner possible on his entry into the club-room one night soon after the frost set in. Nothing less than a shake of the hand all round, commencing with the chairman, would do, and there was quite a keen competition amongst his fellow-members which should be the first to stand the great man a drop of something to drink.

A trim, dapper-looking personage was Tom, with a fresh, ruddy-looking, clean-shaved face, and just about the keenest eye you ever saw—a restless, roving eye that seemed to be looking everywhere at once. Needless to say he 'dressed' the part all over, and looked the huntsman in mufti every inch of him, from the well-tied, snow-white muslin cravat, to the toes of his perfectly blacked, round-toed boots.

The worthy huntsman had not long settled down to his cigar and hot gin-and-water before Bob Magnum called on him for a contribution to the evening's amusement.

'Look here, Tom,' said he, 'we don't see very much of you during the hunting season, unless, as now, there is a frost, so we don't intend to let you off to-night without a song or a yarn. Gentlemen!' cried Bob, raising his voice, and emphasizing his remarks by a knock on the table with his presidential hammer, 'I call on Tom Dalby for a song or story.'

There was great applause at this, and it was some time before the huntsman was allowed to speak, owing to the clinking of glasses and the stamping of feet. (I fear the members of the Club were a noisy lot on the whole.)

'Hold hard, gentlemen,' said Tom, holding up his hand just as if he were addressing a too impetuous field at a check—'hold hard, whilst I make my cast, if you please. I don't know,' continued he, 'whether any of the company here have ever been made an April fool of. It's a silly practice, to my thinking, only fit for school-girls and such-like. Anyhow, I was made a fool of, one first of April, not many years ago,

and with your kind permission I will tell you all about it.'

Tom accordingly, without any more ado, proceeded to relate the following experience:

I never keep no account of any particular day in the year except, perhaps, it is the first of November, which is our first day of fox-hunting, being the one in my calendar I set most store by, as is only natural. Accordingly, some four years ago, when the first of April, known to a lot of silly people as All Fools' Day (and I may here remark a very good name too), came round as usual, I had forgotten all about it, so that when I was woke up at five o'clock in the morning by a great knocking at my bedroom door, and on inquiring what was the matter, I was answered by a pretty, good-for-nothing niece, who was just then on a visit to us, that the feeder had come up to say that I was wanted immediately in the kennel, because Daffodil and Dairymaid, two of the very best hounds in the pack, and especial favourites with my lord, had been taken with hydrophobia, I never for one minute suspected it was a hoax; but without hesitating a second, jumped out of bed, and hastily clapping on a pair of trousers, snatched up a hunting-whip, and bolted off as hard as ever I could pelt, with my heart in my mouth, to look after my two sick hounds, fully expecting when I got there to have to send for my gun to destroy the poor things there and then, to prevent the mischief spreading to the rest of the pack, and wondering as I ran along whether any of the other hounds had been bitten.

Old Sam Grimley, the feeder, as dry an old stick as ever drew breath, was there as usual plodding about in his accustomed methodical fashion, and you should just have seen his face when I inquired after the two hounds. He stared at me open-mouthed for a full minute, and then for the first time since I had known him (and that was getting on for twenty years) broke into a regular horse laugh.

'Hydrophoby be danged!' exclaimed he. 'The blessed hounds be all as well as you be! Why,' continued the old man, his little bloodshot eyes twinkling with merriment as he gazed at my scantily attired figure, 'them women must ha' been makin' what's called a "Hapril fool" on 'ee, master!'

And muttering and chuckling to himself, the old sinner turned his quid in his cheek, and betook himself to the boiling-house, as much as to say it was waste of time talking to anyone so devoid of intelligence as I was.

And sure enough the old man had hit the right nail on the head, as I soon found out, for on my returning to the house, desperately angry, as you may imagine, there was my little good-for-nothing vixen of a niece standing at the front-door as bold as brass, holding her sides, and laughing fit to kill herself at having made an April fool of poor old Uncle Tom, as she called me, the deceitful young hussy! It was really too bad, and I both felt and looked exceedingly annoyed at being made look so small before the servant girl, to say nothing of the whips and helpers. I put on my most severe expression, indeed, for Miss Saucy's express benefit; but, Lor' bless ye! it had about as much effect as a

hunting-whip would have on a rhinoceros's hide. The audacious hussy actually laughed ten times louder than ever, and putting her arms round my neck, and kissing me, called me a dear old April fool, and declared she wouldn't leave go until I kissed her back, and said I was sorry for having looked so cross. And you'll scarcely believe it, gentlemen, but I actually did it, too (I always was so gallus soft with women, especially when they're pretty ones, remarked Tom apologetically). Having made it up with my mischievous niece, I bade her send me up some hot water and order breakfast to be got ready in half an hour—it was still early, but I can't abear waiting for my breakfast—and then went upstairs to my room to make myself decent.

Up came the shaving water, the girl grinning double as she put it down, at the idea of master being so easily taken in, I presume—I had half a mind to have boxed her ears.

Whilst I shaved I had the pleasure of hearing my frolicsome niece (who was evidently determined to make the most of All Fools' Day) calling Crib, the terrier, whom she had lured into a cupboard under false pretences by pretending there was a rat there, an April fool. I felt sorry for the poor dog, so much so that I couldn't resist calling out, 'Bite her, Crib! Bite her, boy!' In another second I was cursing the first of April harder than ever, for in the excitement of the moment my razor slipped, and gave me a tremendous gash in the chin, so much so that I bled like a pig, and had to shout out to the missus for some nap off my best Sunday hat to stop the flow of blood. Lord, how I did go on, to be sure!

Then when I had stopped it as I thought, the bleeding broke out afresh, and spoilt the white neckcloth I had just tied so elaborately. I had to tear it off and put on another. It was a lawn meet too, that day, and I, of course, wanted to look smarter than usual if possible.

At last I came downstairs and, upon my word, if it didn't seem the silly season with everybody. The kidneys were done to a cinder, the eggs weren't boiled, and my spurs, usually like silver, were disgraceful.

I stormed, my niece laughed, and the missus snivelled.

At last I could stand it no longer, so I jumped up, got my gloves and cap and whip, and off I went, and the men being ready and waiting, I mounted my horse, the glad hounds were let out, and away we went. I was just congratulating myself that I was well away from the women and their silly ways when, if you'll believe it, I'm blessed if the horse I was on didn't suddenly fall as lame as a tree.

I had to get off and send my second horseman back for another, whilst I got on his. You can imagine what a heavenly temper I was in by the time I arrived at the meet, gentlemen. I should have liked to have got off and had a round with somebody, that I should. Even at the meet they couldn't leave me alone. There had been a ball overnight at the house in front of which we met, and a big champagne breakfast was in full swing when me and the hounds arrived. Champagne is rare stuff for making people merry, and a lot of the young sparks, who had filled their skins with the sparkling wine, were just ready for a bit of fun. I really believe they'd have chaffed the Archbishop of Canter-

bury if he'd been there. So you may imagine they weren't very particular what they said to me, though I can't help expressing my opinion, gentlemen, that a certain amount of respect is due to a huntsman.

Well, it looked really as if they were all aware of the fact that I had got out of bed that morning the wrong side. I'm blessed if they didn't all make a dead set at me! You never heard such a lot of silly chaff and nonsense as went on in all your born days.

'Tom's cut himself shaving this morning, b' Jove!' sings out one, pointing with his hunting-whip to the piece of black sticking-plaster on my chin; 'look at him! he only wants his hair *poudré*, and he'd look quite like a good-looking young woman at a fancy ball.'

'So he does,' says another. 'Tom, you old rascal! you were screwed last night, I know, weren't you now? No wonder your hand shook.'

'Never mind him,' says young Sir Charles Larkins; 'have a pick-me-up, Tom. What'll you have—champagne, sherry, curaçoa, brandy or what? Only give it a name.'

'Thankee kindly, Sir Charles,' says I. 'I'll take a glass of curaçoa.' (I'm particularly partial to curaçoa, gentlemen.)

'Very good,' says the young baronet. 'There's some prime stuff here. I'll send you some out.'

In he goes into the house, and a minute or two after out comes a footman with a bottle and glasses, and pours me out a drop.

'But this ain't curaçoa!' exclaimed I, eyeing the stuff very hard. 'Why, it's white!'

'Of course it is,' says Sir Charles, who was looking on. 'It's white curaçoa, and first-rate tackle too, especially when you're chippy; much better than brown, and so you'll say, Tom, when it's trickling down your gullet.'

So I tipped it off at a gulp, as I usually do anything short like that. And as I did so, Sir Charles and all of 'em, including the footman, burst into a roar of laughter. It was water!

'Oh, you April fool!' they all shouted, as pleased as Punch at having done me brown, as they called it.

Yes, there I was, gentlemen, actually made an April fool for the second time that morning. Too bad, that it was!

I wasn't going to be done out of my drink though, and accordingly the footman was sent for some of the real article—brown this time—and very good it was; so good I remember that I wetted both eyes. Lor' bless you, I could have ridden over anything after it! not, you understand, that I'm one of those who require jumping-powder to make him go. Oh dear no; I only mean to say that the influence of the good stuff made me feel more lively and venturesome than usual—I hardly know really how to express it.

Well, by-and-by out came my lord, and the company having had a good look at the hounds, the order was at length given for a start, and accordingly away we all trotted across the park to draw the home wood, I congratulating myself as we went along that I had done with April fools and such-like nonsense for that day at all events.

Now, there is an old saying, gentlemen, with which, no doubt, you are all of you well acquainted, which runs: 'Don't count your chickens until they are hatched.' There is another equally old saying, gentlemen, with which, doubtless, you are also familiar, which goes: 'Never holler until you are out of the wood.'

Both these sayings applied equally to me on this occasion. If anybody had said to me at that moment, as I was cantering across the park with my hounds all round me, that I should have been made an April fool of for the third time that morning, I should not only have called him a fool, but I should have offered to make him a bet of a pound to a brass farthing against it. What is more, if the bet had been accepted I should have lost—I should, indeed.

I will now tell you, gentlemen, how I was done for the third time that morning.

We drew the home wood blank, and then trotted off to a smallish covert of perhaps fifteen or sixteen acres or thereabouts.

I did not much expect to find a fox there, for as a rule we always drew it blank, and on this particular day I thought it less likely for a find than usual; for, as you are well aware, the woods just about that period of the year are always full of women and children gathering primroses and violets. Well, I popped the hounds in and they proceeded to spread themselves over the wood in a listless sort of manner, as much as to say, 'There's no fox here, Tom; why this waste of time?' when all of a sudden a loud holloa was heard from the right-hand corner of the wood, the same side by which we entered. 'Well, that's a curious thing,' thinks I to myself. 'Not

a hound gives so much as a whimper as yet, and according to the sound, the fox, if fox it is, must have gone against the wind'—rather an unusual thing to do, as you are probably aware, gentlemen.

'Oh, it must be a mistake,' I thought; 'somebody's seen a hare, and taken it for a fox.'

But no; there was the holloa again—a most unmistakable 'Tally-ho!' too. Losing no more time, I blew my horn, got my hounds round me, and away I went, crashing through the hazel-stems as hard as I could go, to the corner whence the holloa proceeded from, joined on the way by the greater part of the field, who were congregated in the principal ride. I got to the corner and out by a little bridle-gate there was, and was immediately aware of a great red-headed young Chawbacon, standing in the field waving his hat, and shouting 'Tally-ho!' with all his might and main.

'Where's he gone, noisy?' shouted I, riding up to him, followed by the hounds.

'Wheer's *who* gone?' answered the bumpkin.

'Why, the fox, to be sure, stupidhead!' said I, getting impatient.

'Vox! There bain't no vox—at least, not as Oi've seen,' he replied.

'Well, but you hollered "Tally-ho!" didn't you?' said I, my temper rising. 'What did you holloa for if you saw no fox?'

'What did Oi 'oller vor?' replied Chawbacon, grinning from ear to ear, until he showed every tooth in his head. 'Whoy, to make a April vool of yer, to be shure! This be the vurst of April, this be!'

I was so staggered for the moment, gentlemen, that I could scarcely speak, and sat on my horse staring at the bumpkin like one bereft of his senses.

The roar of laughter, however, that went up from the gentlemen standing round roused me, and gathering up the thong of my whip, I went for my persecutor.

Away he bolted across the field, and me after him. Lord! how I flogged him! You should have heard him bellow—just for all the world like a young bull.

It was a longish run to the gate at the end of the field, and by the time my friend had got there he was pretty well done, so much so that when he tried to climb over the gate he stuck on the top, a position peculiarly favourable for the use of my hunting-whip, and of which I took every advantage, you may depend. I don't think a ploughboy or anybody else ever got a better horsewhipping than this chap did.

At last he toppled over the other side out of my reach, and lay on the ground, bellowing 'Murder!' loud enough to frighten all the birds away from the covert, if nothing else. I gave him a little language appropriate to the occasion (quite a Commination Service, as Parson Merrythought observed), and then turned my horse round to rejoin the hounds, feeling very much better. The amount of vinegar and brown paper that poor chap must have used! Gentlemen, it makes me quite sad when I think of it. One thing is very certain: I don't think Master Chawbacon is likely to try and make an April fool of anyone for some time to come—certainly not a huntsman.











A HOLIDAY ADVENTURE

THE DETECTIVE'S STORY

THERE was no better known or more popular tradesman in the town of Barleyford than Tommy Clippum, as he was always called, the sporting barber in the High Street. Tommy, indeed, was a great card with both high and low. Besides being hairdresser in ordinary to the countryside (it would have been an act of downright lunacy for any rival barber to set up shop in opposition to Tommy; one misguided individual once tried it on, but as Bob Magnum dryly remarked, 'Lor' bless you! the poor chap was in the court in less than three months'), he was clerk of the course at the races—an important function, and one very much appreciated by the sporting barber, as it was the means of bringing him into contact with the county magnates, from the Most Noble the Marquis of Muskrat downwards. And the swells, as he termed them, liking Tommy quite as much as Tommy liked them, the races prospered exceedingly under his management, so well, indeed, as to cause angry passions to rise in the bosoms of sundry other clerks of courses whose mis-

fortune lay in not possessing the persuasive powers their detested rival. On the race-days, of which th are two, it is a truly noble sight, as his admiring w says, to behold Tommy in all his glory receiving t company on the grand-stand; now bowing low to Duchess; anon purple with laughter at a bon mot ju told him by young Lord Wagley. Tommy's sho always busy, is extra full of customers on market-day for besides his hair-cutting business, he sells sundr other commodities much appreciated by country folk such as all the paraphernalia appertaining to cricket football and lawn-tennis. Fishing tackle, too, of al sorts Tommy keeps, and here let me remark that should any follower of the gentle craft among m readers find himself at Barleyford at any time, anc want to try his skill in the river Swimmet, so famous for its trout and grayling fishing, he cannot do better. should he desire any information on the subject, than apply to Tommy, who, himself an ardent and successful fisherman, will not only tell him all he wants to know, but give him the best advice as to the most killing fly to use.

Of course, our sporting barber is a member of the Horse shoe Club—I rather think, indeed, he was one of the originators, if not *the* originator—and a most popular member he is, for nobody sings a better song or tells a better story than the festive Tommy. Needless to say, any friend of his introduced by him is made free of the place at once. When, therefore, rather late one evening Tommy appeared with a companion, who he promptly introduced to the company as 'my friend, Mr Samuel Tester, gentlemen, late of the Detective

Department, Scotland Yard,' the right hand of good fellowship (mingled, perhaps, with some awe) was promptly held out to the latter.

'It will be odd,' whispered Bob Magnum in my ear, as the stranger took a seat, 'if I don't run the Bobby in for a story in the course of the night. Ought to be game for a good one; don't you think so?' added he.

Accordingly, true to his word, Bob later on took the opportunity, whilst toasting Tommy Clippum's health and song, of suggesting that perhaps his friend might care to amuse the company with some anecdote culled from his past experiences, which, added the diplomatic Bob, with a bow to Mr. Tester, he felt sure must be very great, if he would allow him to say so.

And Mr. Tester, who was a ruddy-faced, jovial-looking personage, in appearance more like a well-to-do farmer than a policeman, having modestly expressed his thanks for the compliment paid him, and testified his willingness to oblige, shortly afterwards launched into the following story:

It was in the spring of the year some fifteen years ago, and some three after I had been promoted into the Detective Department, that, feeling rather hipped and out of sorts, owing mainly, I fancy, to the worries and anxieties consequent on some very difficult cases I had had of late under my especial care, and which had in two instances turned out failures; and being advised by the divisional doctor that a complete rest for a week or so would do me a world of good—nay more, was really necessary to my well-being—I bethought me of a long-standing promise of mine to pay a visit to my old friend

and schoolfellow, Harry Coleman, who, having married a pretty cousin of my own not long before, had settled down to farming on a largish scale in Buttercup-shire.

My mind being made up, I wrote off to Harry asking if he could have me for a few days. Back came his reply by return of post. He and his wife, he wrote, would be only too delighted to see me, and the longer I stayed the better they would be pleased. He added: 'You couldn't have chosen a better time, old man, for your visit, for our Hunt Steeplechases are coming off next Wednesday—always a great event in these parts—added to which the Duke's hounds don't shut up hunting for another fortnight, so that you will be able to have a bit of fun with them before you return to town. I can promise you one thing,' wound up Harry: 'I can mount you well, for I have got one or two tip-toppers in my stable just now, of which, needless to say, you shall have the pick. When we were boys together you were a good one to ride, and I remember my poor old dad would often remark that there was a good steeplechase jockey spoiled when fate made a policeman of you.'

I may here remark, gentlemen, that what my friend said was perfectly correct. Like himself, I was the son of a farmer, and had been well 'entered' to sport of all kinds, especially hunting, at a very early age. Unfortunately, my father, who had for some time—though none of us knew it—been hopelessly involved in debt, died one fine day, leaving literally nothing behind him. There was a sale, of course, and when everything was settled it was found that there was just sufficient, and

only just, saved out of the wreck to keep my mother and sister, so there was no alternative but for me and my brother to go out into the world and shift for ourselves. I went into the police, as you are aware; and, on the whole, though it was a bit irksome at first, have no cause to regret having done so.

On the receipt of Harry's letter, I lost no time in applying to my chief for leave of absence, which being readily accorded to me, I wrote off to my cousin to expect me on the morrow. Lord! what a welcome I got from them all at the farm! When I got to the station, there was Harry—a little stouter, but just the same as ever—waiting for me in a smart dogcart, with as good-looking a mare between the shafts as ever I clapped eyes on. Dashed if I didn't think he'd have wrung my hand off, he was so precious glad to see me! And when he got me home, the way he began entertaining on my account—Harry was always a free, generous-hearted chap—was really too bad. As I told his wife, I felt almost like the Prodigal Son. It was not a bit of use my remonstrating and saying I had come down for a little quiet and repose, and to enjoy the country air and so forth. Harry's answer was that he had made up his mind for a regular lark the very first time I paid them a visit at the farm, and, with every due regard for me, a lark he intended to have.

On the morning after my arrival, the Hunt Steeplechases that Harry had told me about in his letter were fixed to come off, an event we all looked forward to with the deepest interest, seeing that my hospitable entertainer had entered and was going to ride his own mare, Polly Perkins, in the Farmers' Cup, a much coveted prize

in those parts, and which he was extremely sanguine of winning.

It was a beautiful spring morning, the sun shining and the birds singing, and it was a merry party, I can tell you, that started from the farm in the wagonette, bound for Farleigh Park, where the races were held. I for one, I know, felt as jolly as a sandboy, the pleasant company I was in and the fine day combined causing me to forget all my worries and troubles. In short, I felt on the best possible terms with myself. Nobody, thought I, as I sat in the wagonette with a pretty girl on each side of me, cracking jokes and making the country lanes ring with our laughter, would take me for a grim detective from Scotland Yard.

I forgot to tell you, by the way, that I had asked Harry, as a particular favour to myself, not to mention my profession to anybody, thinking that perhaps, were it known, the good country folk might not regard me with such favour as they otherwise would, my calling not being the most popular in the world, as probably you are aware. And he seeing things quite in the same light as I did, I was introduced to all his friends as 'my wife's cousin, Mr. Sam Tester, from London.' It was just as well that I was so introduced, as it turned out, for had it been known what my real calling was, in all probability I should have missed one of the neatest captures of a daring criminal I ever succeeded in making during my sojourn in the police force. To return to the races. After an hour's delightful drive we arrived safely on the course, and having got the wagonette in a good position at the cords, and had the horses taken out, Harry and I left the ladies to take care of them-



selves for a bit, whilst we went off to take a look round on our own account. We had just got as far as the stand, when a loud 'Hi!' and a rattle of polechains in our rear made us start, and draw on one side to get out of the way of a coach, the roof of which was laden with ladies and gentlemen and was driven by a dark-complexioned, goodish-looking man, with rather a satanic cast of countenance, and dressed in the height of fashion, who now pulled up in workmanlike fashion at the entrance to the stand. Somehow, the instant I caught sight of him I seemed to be familiar with his face. So, keeping well in the background, I had a good stare at him before he dismounted from the box of the drag. 'Where have I seen you?' thought I to myself. 'If I don't know that nose, like the beak of an eagle, and those piercing black eyes, my name's not what it is.'

'Harry, old man,' said I, drawing my host on one side, 'who's the swell who's just driven up in that coach? There: the man just taking off his great-coat, I mean.'

'Him?' replied Harry. ' 'Oh, that's Mr. Bellefield, the Australian millionaire. He is a rich man if you like, my boy. A thousand a day and two on Sunday—that's about the ticket. I wish I'd got half his complaint, don't you, old fellow?' laughed Harry. 'He only came here just before Christmas,' continued my informant; 'arrived at the Crown Hotel at Fulborough one day with his hunters and servants, and here he's been ever since. He's made himself very popular, too, during his stay, for he entertains like a prince, and subscribed a hundred to the hounds without even waiting to be asked; and last, but not least, has proposed to and been accepted by Miss Marigold, the great heiress in these

parts. Nobody can make out what on earth he went in for her for, for she is by no means good-looking, though she is a nice amiable girl, I believe. She has three hundred thousand pounds of her own, it is true, and Bramleigh Court is a beautiful place, but he don't want money, so naturally the engagement caused a good deal of astonishment, and, I may add, disappointment, for I fancy a good many of the mothers about had the Australian in their mind's eye for their girls.'

Well, Harry went off to look for his horse, and I wended my way back to the wagonette to talk to the ladies. Do what I would, though, the features of the rich Australian would keep cropping up in my mind's eye, and the question still kept uppermost in my mind, 'Where have I seen you?' Even the ladies twitted me with being absent-minded, and no wonder.

'Hang the fellow!' thought I; 'you're spoiling all my fun. I wish to goodness I hadn't seen you!'

Soon after the races began, and then, what with arranging sweeps in my hat for the ladies, and looking on at the races, to say nothing of the excitement amongst the occupants in the wagonette when my old friend Harry won the Farmers' Cup in a canter on Polly Perkins, I managed for a while to forget my 'old man of the sea.'

Well, gentlemen, I shall always remember that particular steeplechase meeting as the pleasantest day's outing I ever had in my life. I really don't think I ever did enjoy myself so much, either before or since. To top all, as I have already told you, my host won that coveted trophy the Farmers' Cup on his own mare,



and you may imagine, therefore, the glorious jollification we had at the farm that night in consequence.

There was a splendid supper, I remember, one of the principal dishes, and certainly the most favoured, being a lobster salad of enormous proportions. Now I never can resist a lobster salad under any circumstances. I believe, if I was dying to-morrow, I should sing out for lobster salad. Unfortunately, fond as I am of it, lobster salad don't like me, especially at night, so you will not perhaps be surprised when I tell you that I was paid off for my over-indulgence in the fascinating dish by the visitation during my sleep of a most fearful nightmare, which took the form of the rich Australian—the millionaire, Mr. Bellefield.

I fondly imagined I had got rid of him on the racecourse, but not a bit of it. Not content with teasing me in a thousand extraordinary ways after the manner of nightmares, he finished up at last by seizing me by the throat with both hands, whilst he hammered my head on the ground, crying out between each bang:

'Now then, you inquisitive scoundrel! who am I? Eh? Who am I? Do you know me?'

'No, I don't,' I gasped.

He started up at this, tore off the long cloak he was enveloped in, and stood upright in front of me dressed in the garb of a convict.

'Now do you know me?' said he, looking more like a devil than ever.

'Yes, I do!' I shouted at the top of my voice. 'You're Jim Norton, alias the Snake, and I'll take you dead or alive!' and with that I made a dash at his throat.

* * * * *

'Hallo! gently does it, old man! Don't quite throttle a fellow,' said a friendly voice.

And, waking up, I found myself standing in the middle of the room in my nightshirt, whilst opposite to me stood my old friend Harry, also in his nightshirt, roaring with laughter.

'Why,' said he, 'whatever is the matter with you? You were making such a row with your shouting and halloing that the missus and me thought something was the matter, and, coming out to see, I'm blowed if you didn't go at me like a tiger, and nearly squeeze the life out of me.'

'It was that confounded lobster salad!' said I, rubbing my eyes. 'It always plays me that trick. All the same, though, this time it has done me a good turn, or I'm much mistaken. Sit down, old friend, for a few minutes; I want to have a talk with you.'

I think Harry thought me a little mad—possibly not quite sober. However, down he sat, and then I told him the upshot of my dream.

'Then, do you mean to say,' ejaculated Harry, rubbing his eyes, 'that Mr. Bellefield is——'

'No more an Australian millionaire than you or I, my dear boy,' I replied coolly. 'His name is Jim Norton, alias the Snake, one of the most artful and dangerous ruffians in England. He has already done a long term for burglary, and is now wanted for a great robbery on the South-Eastern Railway—gagged and bound a great Paris financier travelling in a first-class carriage in the mail one night, and robbed him of coupons and securities to the tune of thirty thousand pounds. There is a thousand reward for his apprehen-



sion, and that thousand, Harry, I intend to claim before the week's out. You said, I think, the hounds meet at Bramleigh Court—the place belonging to the lady the rascal is engaged to—to-morrow, didn't you?'

'That's right,' replied Harry.

'Very good; then, I'll have him there, you see if I don't,' said I. 'I never arrested a man in the hunting-field yet,' I continued, laughing. 'It will give quite a relish to the thing. And now, Harry,' said I, 'let's go to bed again, both of us, and for goodness'-sake, old man, don't say a word to a soul, not even to your wife. Promise me, won't you?'

'Mum's the word,' replied my host in a whisper, grinning from ear to ear, and looking me over with an air of intense admiration—'mum's the word! You can rely upon me, and if you want any help to-morrow, I shall be close and handy, you may depend. Sam,' he gasped out, as he shook me by the hand before leaving the room, 'you'll be the greatest man in the whole of Buttercupshire by this time to-morrow, see if you're not.'

'If you'll excuse me, gentlemen,' said Mr. Tester at this point, 'I will break off my narrative for a second just to have my glass replenished, for I'm a bit thirsty, to tell the truth, with so much talking.'

Accordingly, after a short interval, during which not only the story-teller but his listeners refilled their tumblers, the ex-detective resumed his narrative.

Well, gentlemen, my host, who was quite as much excited, if not more so than I was, rigged me up the next morning in a pair of his breeches and boots, so

that I might take the field in proper trim, and after a substantial breakfast we prepared to make a start.

'Have you got everything you want?' asked Harry—'whip, sandwiches, and so on?'

'Yes, everything, thanks, including these,' said I, drawing, as I spoke, half-way out of my coat-pocket, for my host's inspection, a pair of handcuffs.

'Ah, yes, you'll want them,' said Harry, with a grin. 'And now come on.'

Another minute we were on our horses and away.

It being the last meet of the season, there was a tremendous assemblage of sportsmen, mounted, on foot, and in carriages. It was a case of open house for all comers, and we might have gone in and had some refreshment like the rest; indeed, I begged Harry to do so, but he declined on the score of wanting to see me through my little affair. He had not long to wait.

The clock was just striking twelve when the fair hostess, accompanied by her future husband, made her appearance on the steps outside the hall-door. Harry and I, both of us on foot, waited until our man had lifted Miss Marigold into her saddle before taking action. He was just going to mount himself; his left hand, holding the reins, was resting on the pommel of the saddle, and he was just putting his foot in the stirrup, when, creeping close behind him, I snapped the handcuff on his right wrist. Harry, who had followed me like a shadow, at the same time seized the rascal's left hand in a grasp of iron, and in another second Mr. Bellefield, otherwise Jim Norton, alias the Snake, was hard and fast. You should have seen the fellow's face when he grasped the situation. You never saw a chap

so crestfallen in all your life; he hadn't even spirit enough to swear. At first Miss Marigold wouldn't believe it. However, she soon tumbled to what an escape she had had, and before I left she was good enough to express her thanks to me for being the means of rescuing her from such a dreadful future as hers would have been. It effectually stopped the hunt for that day, as you may imagine, and, as Harry had prognosticated, I was quite the hero of the hour. What became of Jim Norton? Oh, he got twenty years; and serve him right, the scamp!

As for me, I got the reward, and any amount of praise at headquarters, which latter was, of course, very gratifying, and which I hope, gentlemen, you will think I deserved. It *was* rather a neat job, wasn't it? If it hadn't been, though, for that lobster salad, and the consequent nightmare, the plant mightn't have come off—upon my word it mightn't; and think what a pity that would have been!

ONE HUNDRED POUNDS REWARD

THE HORSE-DEALER'S STORY

There are very few sportsmen—nay, I will go further than that and say residents in the county generally—who have not had transactions at some time or another with old George Topper, the horse-dealer. Indeed, there is probably not a better known man in the whole of Buttercupshire, and certainly not a more popular one. Consequently, when his rosy-gilled, double-chinned countenance is seen peering in at the club-room door one Saturday night, its owner is hailed with acclamation by the company present.

'Come up here, Mr. Topper,' cries Bob Magnum, motioning the old boy as he speaks to a chair on his left hand. And the dealer makes his way accordingly up the long room, exchanging greetings *en route* with his friends; and at last quite out of breath with his climb up the stairs, and his exertions in the talking line, plumps himself down in the seat assigned him, not, though, before he had greeted me with a kind inquiry as to my health and the well-being of a certain 'little bay 'oss'—an animal that has not long since been transferred from his stables to mine.



Our friend looks the 'horse-dealer,' every inch of him, with his cut-away coat, his blue bird's-eye neckcloth, with the rounded collar just peeping over it, and the trousers which fit his substantial old legs literally like a glove, so tight are they. There is a knowing-looking twinkle about the eyes, as much as to say their owner was not born yesterday; otherwise his clean-shaven, rosy face with its habitual good-humoured expression, topped by the snow-white hair which gives him a benevolent and venerable appearance, is decidedly calculated to inspire confidence in a customer. At his little place, as he is pleased modestly to term his comfortable house and extensive stabling, situated at Larkhall, some three miles from the town, you can see every variety of horse it is possible to imagine, from the three hundred guinea hunter for my lord to the tiny Shetland pony for Master Johnny. All sorts he has, but his speciality is the hunter, there is no doubt about it; and I should say that a beginner at the game, desirous to be well mounted, and dependent on the honesty and good faith of the dealer for good value for his money, could not do better than put himself in the hands of George Topper.

As good judge of a horseman as he is of a horse, he generally knows to a T what sort of a nag to recommend. A Past Grand Master in the art of chaff, any rash youth thinking to get a rise out of the old one would be very apt to find himself hoisted with his own petard. Many quaint sayings of his to customers are on record, of which the following is a sample:

Customer to Mr. Topper, looking over at a horse he thinks of buying: 'Can he go fast?'

Mr. Topper: 'Like the wind.'

Customer: 'Can he jump?'

Mr. T.: 'Like a deer. Bless ye, he'd jump a house if ye'd put him at it.'

Customer: 'Well, but can he *stay*?'

Mr. T.: 'As long as a lady in a bonnet-shop.'

After that there was nothing more to be said, and the customer had to buy.

Yet another reminiscence:

The relatives of a young gentleman living in the country, endowed with considerably more money than brains, disgusted with his extravagances and eccentric behaviour generally, determined, as their repeated remonstrances were not of the slightest avail, to call in to their aid the Commissioners in Lunacy, with a view to saving the family estates from going to rack and ruin, as they most assuredly would if some sort of restraint was not quickly put upon their harebrained owner.

The young gentleman in question, shortly before the Commission sat, rode over one fine day to pay old George Topper a visit and ask his opinion on the subject.

'You don't think I'm mad, do you, George?' said he.

'Well, no,' replied the old horse-dealer, straddling his legs wider apart than usual, and looking at his questioner with a sly twinkle in his eye. 'Well, no, I can't go so far as to say that you're exactly what I calls a loon-attic, but there's no doubt about it you're a damned fool.'

This, then, is a slight sketch of the worthy who,

being called upon by Bob Magnum to contribute towards the evening's amusement, launched forth with the following experience.

I was standing one fine September afternoon at the entrance gate to my little place—which opens, as you may recollect, gentlemen, on to the highroad—enjoying the cigar which it is my invariable custom to smoke after my dinner, and thinking about nothing particular, except, perhaps, that it was a remarkable fine day, and that I had got together some of the nicest young Irish horses that it had ever been my lot to come across. I had had an extra good dinner, I recollect, and felt, in consequence, not only on the best of terms with myself, but with all around me—just in that sort of humour, in fact, when a man feels that he would lend a friend, no matter how impecunious, a five-pound note if asked to do so—when my reverie was suddenly disturbed by a stranger accosting me. He was a tall, slim young fellow, well set up and with good features, but very shabby in his dress, especially about the boots, as I couldn't help noticing.

'Beg your pardon, Mr. Topper, can I have a word with you?' said he, touching his hat.

'As many as you like,' I replied, feeling in my pocket for some silver, for I thought I could guess pretty well what form the conversation would take.

He was evidently a quick-witted chap by the way he divined my intentions, for he laughingly observed:

'I'm not going to ask you to put your hand in your pocket, Mr. Topper, thank you all the same. What I

wanted to ask is, have you anything just now for a chap out of work to do?'

'Work! What sort of work?' says I, for somehow he didn't seem much in my line.

He looked to me more like a clerk or something of that sort.

'Well, making young horses, rough-riding, driving four-in-hand,' says he, as confident and off-hand as possible. 'Been at it all my life, Mr. Topper,' says he, 'and I think I can give you satisfaction if you employ me.'

'Any character?' says I.

'None,' says he. 'I've never done a thing in my life except amuse myself—have never had any occasion to, indeed. However, just now, owing to circumstances over which I've no control, I find myself obliged to earn my own living, and I don't see my way to do so unless it is in connection with horses in some shape or form. Character!' exclaimed the young man with a scornful laugh. 'The only people I could refer you to would give me a thundering bad one, so I must beg to be excused bringing them into it.'

'Well, that's honest, at all events,' thought I.

'And you say you can ride well, eh—plenty of pluck, and so on?' I continued.

'I have always been told I had a good seat and hands on a horse,' returned the young man modestly; 'and as for pluck, all I can say is, I am ready to get up this moment on any horse you bid me, and I'll guarantee to ride at any fence you tell me to, no matter how big. I can't say more than that, can I, sir?'

Well, gentlemen, the poor young fellow pleaded so

hard that I told him to come up to the house and have a bit of dinner, and afterwards I would put him up on one of the young horses, and see what he could do—give him a fair trial, in fact.

He didn't say more, but the look of delight which came into his face I shall never forget. I could scarcely keep pace with my young friend, he was in such a hurry to get home.

When we got there, my wife went to see about some grub for him, whilst I had a drop of whisky-and-water, and thought whether I could find a berth for him. She came back full of him, bless ye.

'Why, he's a gentleman, George,' says she, 'or I never saw one yet; and you may depend upon it he's run away from home or fell in love with someone he didn't ought to, or something mysterious.'

'Ha, ha, ha!' laughed I. The old woman had weaved up such a romantic story in that brain of hers as would have done credit, I told her, to the *Family Herald* she was so partial to reading.

'You'll take him, of course, George,' says she, 'if only out of charity?'

'I'll take him if he can ride, my dear,' I replied; 'not without, I'm blessed if I do. If he only performs half as well as he says he can, I'll engage him at once. If he don't come up to expectations, why, I'll give him half a crown and tell him to go about his business.'

This was fair, and my missus couldn't deny it, so she got her knitting and sat down and waited until the young chap had finished his food and was ready to show us what he was made of.

We had not long to wait, for in less than ten

minutes he sent word to say he was ready, if I was. Out I went then, lent my gentleman a pair of spurs and a cutting whip, and bid him follow me. When we got to the stables I told them to bring out a young Irish horse that I had had about a fortnight, and had given my men no end of trouble. He'd got the tenderest mouth imaginable, and none of my chaps had fine enough hands for him. Pull at him and he'd chuck his head in the air, and fight, and tear, and drive himself nearly mad. He was one of those horses, in fact, that required the most delicate handling imaginable. Such a good-looking one, too, he was!

'There!' said I, as the horse in question was brought out; 'jump up, young fellow, and come out this way, and we'll see what you can do with him.'

He gave the horse a pat on his neck, as much as to say, 'We shall be good friends, I know,' and then signalled to Jack Ryan, an Irish rough-rider of mine, who was standing by, to give him a leg up, as cool as a cucumber.

'Paddy' Ryan, as he was called, looked as black as thunder, and took no notice.

'Give him a hoist, directly, man!' said I, seeing what his game was.

So the Irishman did as he was told with a very bad grace, and in a second Ned Smith, as he called himself, was in the saddle.

'And, by Jingo!' said I to myself, as I watched the young brown horse step jauntily out of the yard under him, snatching playfully at his bit, without any of the tossing of head and fuss there generally was, 'you're a horseman, young man, or I'm very much mistaken.'



'What shall I do now, sir?' asked the novice, turning round in his saddle, and treating the young un as if he was the quietest shooting pony in the world.

'Oh, take and lark him about. Send him at everything you see,' said I, pointing as I spoke to the different jumps all scattered about my big field.

Away he went, now at a trot at the double post and rails, then sending him with a rush at the artificial water-jump. Never did I see a horse and man agree better in all my life. It was a positive treat to see them—it was indeed. As for my men, they were perfectly astounded.

Instead of the young brown horse tearing along as was his custom, fighting for his head and rushing at all his fences like a mad thing, here he was giving to his rider's hand, and taking all his jumps like a seasoned hunter of the most sedate description. I could scarcely believe my eyes, and when at a signal from me the young chap brought the horse back to the stable, I didn't attempt to conceal the satisfaction that I felt. I had got hold of a treasure, that was certain.

'Come this way, young man,' said I, as, having dismounted, my new acquaintance gave the young horse a friendly pat ere he consigned him to a helper—'come this way, and you and me'll have a talk together.'

He followed me into the house, and into the parlour, where you may be sure the missus was waiting for us.

'Will he do?' said she in a whisper, as I entered the room.

'First-rate,' I whispered back.

She shook hands with the young man on the spot,



did that wife of mine, gentlemen, and between you and me, I'm blessed if I don't think she'd have kissed him for about twopence. Oh, she's a rare good-hearted one is my old woman!

The whisky was produced, and then we all sat down and stared at each other for a minute or two. Ned Smith was the first to break silence.

'Well, sir,' said he modestly, 'I hope my riding gave you satisfaction.'

'Young man,' replied I, 'you've got the very best hands on a horse ('an 'oss' the old gentleman pronounced it) I've seen for a very long while. Not only that, you rode that young hunter, who's an uncommon awkward customer as a rule, in a way that does you very great credit; the more so because you've never been on his back before. I shall be happy to take you on at once as rough-rider.' The young man's face got red with pleasure at this. 'Terms, thirty shillings a week, and a room in my head man's cottage. What do you say? Will it suit you?'

He jumped up from his chair, bless you! and gave that gouty hand of mine such a squeeze that I couldn't help singing out with pain.

'Hold hard!' says I; 'you haven't got such a light hand as I thought you had.'

He apologized, saying he was very sorry, but he was so pleased he couldn't help it. He then turned to my wife to shake hands with her, and blowed if she didn't burst out a-crying, and hug him to her bosom! I didn't say anything, for I knew she was thinking of our poor boy that we had lost only a year before. And then we three sat down to have tea together,



Ned, as we called him—for we had got so friendly all of a sudden that it really seemed as if we had known him for years—declaring that he had never felt so happy in his life.

After tea, and when the missus had left the room, I took upon myself, with as much delicacy as I could, to ask the lad what money he had got about him. I say 'delicacy' advisedly, because I felt now pretty sure from his manner that he was something out of the common run of young men.

He replied with a blush (I never saw such a chap as he was to blush), putting his hand in his trouser-pocket as he spoke, and counting its contents out on to the table:

'Fourteen and elevenpence halfpenny. There, Mr. Topper,' says he, 'that's all I possess in the wide world, as I'm a living sinner.'

'Then,' says I, 'I'll advance you a tenner on account, for I dare say,' says I, 'you'll be wanting some clothes and odds and ends, so as to enable you to settle down comfortable.'

'You've guessed it to a T,' says he, 'and I'm very much obliged, sir; and if you don't mind I'll just be off into the town and get what I want, so as to start fair in the morning.'

So I went to my bureau, got out ten sovereigns, and handed them to him then and there, and off he went as pleased as Punch.

The next morning, when I went out, there was my young friend as fresh as paint, but with such a black eye! You never saw such a black eye. I never did.

'How did you get that?' I inquired, feeling rather dis-

appointed, I must say, for I thought he had been drinking and playing the fool on the strength of my loan.

'Oh, I met that Irish chap of yours, sir, who looked so black yesterday when you told him to give me a leg up, in the town last night. He insulted me and gave me this.'

'And you? What did you do?' said I.

'Oh, I hit him back, of course,' replied Ned.

'Where is Paddy Ryan?' I inquired of the men standing round.

'In the hospital, sir,' answered my head man, Jack Thomson. 'This young man,' he went on, pointing to Ned admiringly, 'half killed him afore he'd done with him. I think,' added he with a grin, 'you've seen the last of Paddy, master.'

'I'm sure I don't care,' said I; 'I shan't break my heart if I never see him again, for I never liked the man; he was always a drunken rascal, and always will be, in my opinion.'

Well, time went on. November arrived, and with it the hunting, and my new young man had his hands full, I can tell you. He was never out of the saddle, bless you. And such a reputation as he had, too, already! Not only was he my rough-rider, but half the people in the county kept begging for his services into the bargain, whenever they had a nag that wanted some riding. Blowed if they didn't nickname him the Swell, because of his superior manners and his style of dressing.

No wonder he was well turned out, for young Lord Bellevue, for whom he had broken in one or two young



ones, taking a great fancy to him, gave him a letter to his own tailor and bootmaker in London, giving Master Ned carte blanche to order what he liked, the consequence being that his get-up in the hunting-field was not to be excelled by that of his lordship himself.

People who weren't in the 'know' wondered where on earth my rough-rider got his boots and breeches from. Upon my word, gentlemen, my bosom used to swell with pride whenever I looked at him. Such a good-hearted fellow as he was too! Though he got offer after offer from great men round about to be their master of the horse and so on, he refused them all. It went against the grain to keep him from bettering himself, and I tried my best to induce him not to throw such good chances away. But he wouldn't hear of it.

'No, no, Mr. Topper,' says he, 'you behaved nobly to me when I was thrown penniless on the world, and I don't intend to throw you over now—that is,' he added, with a smile, 'if you haven't got a better man in your eye, in which case I won't stand in the way.'

As for the missus, she felt, as she said, like a mother to him.

'I only wish I knew who he was, poor young fellow!' she would say, 'for it seems a sin and a shame that it does, that a real gentleman bred and born, such as I feel sure he is, should be passing the best years of his life amongst people so much beneath him.'

She told me that one day, going over to my head man's cottage, where 'Swell Ned' lodged and boarded, Mrs. Thomson—that was my head man's wife—took her up to his bedroom, and there she saw all the parapher-

nalia of a gentleman, much to her surprise: ivory brushes with a monogram on 'em, silver-topped bottles, a pair of splendid embroidered slippers, and a photograph in a silver frame of one of the most beautiful girls she ever set eyes upon. My wife conjured up another little domestic tragedy, in the *Family Herald* style, on the strength of that photograph, and, if possible, was more motherly and affectionate to the young man than ever the next time they met.

Well, the spring came, and with it the close of the hunting season.

I had had a most successful time, and, thanks to the handling of 'Swell Ned,' had sold nearly all my hunters at extraordinarily good prices. I still, however, had the Irish horse on my hands that he had his 'trial' mount on. The fact was that I sold him for three hundred to a gentleman who saw him perform in the hunting-field with Ned on him, but when he got him home he found he couldn't ride him, so back he came, and having got a bad character, was rather difficult to get rid of. In fact, he was a horse who, unless he had a 'workman' on his back, was no good at all to anyone —certainly not to a chap who couldn't ride.

At Ned's suggestion, then, I entered him in a steeplechase for maiden hunters at our annual hunt-meeting; he himself, of course, to ride.

Oh, what a day that was! The missus and I and a large party all started in one of my big breaks on purpose to see Donnybrook (that was the horse's name) win. They made him favourite, and I had fifty of my own money on him. Alas! for once in a way Ned's horsemanship was of no earthly good. The brown,



maddened by the shouts of the crowd and the scuffle at the fences (there was a biggish field), got clean out of his hand, bolted, and overjumping himself at a fence, fell a buster, breaking his own neck and rolling clean over his jockey, who was picked up for dead.

Well, we brought him home to my house, and for weeks he hovered between life and death. The doctors shook their heads, and it looked at first as if nothing could be done for him. However, at length Dame Nature and a strong constitution prevailed, and one never-to-be-forgotten day 'Swell Ned' was pronounced out of danger. I did not produce a bottle of champagne that day, of course. Oh no! What do you think, gentlemen?

It was the very day after, and I was sitting after dinner having a spell at the newspaper, when all of a sudden an advertisement in the agony column caught my eye.

It ran thus:

'£100 REWARD.

'Missing, from his home in ——shire, since September last, a young gentleman, aged 24; dark hair and eyes, slight moustache, and slightly built; has a scar on left temple, the result of an accident in childhood. Is believed to have enlisted in the cavalry under an assumed name. Whoever will give information as to his whereabouts to Messrs. Dryasdust and Chuckleby, 110, Lincoln's Inn Fields, London, will receive the above reward.'

I knew, gentlemen, directly I read that advertisement, that we had seen the last of Ned Smith. I called the missus, and showed it her. She read it carefully over,

first began to laugh and then to cry, and finally into hysterics. Just like a woman, wasn't it?

What did I do? Why, lit a cigar, ordered a and drove straight into the town and wired to lawyers, with the result that one of 'em (Dryasd think it was) put in an appearance the very next m ing. Ned was fast asleep when he came, so I took up to his room, and he had a look at him as he l bed. One glance was sufficient.

'That's him, sure enough,' he whispered.

We went downstairs again on tip-toe, and the words the lawyer uttered were:

'I'll write you a cheque for the hundred now, Topper, if you'll kindly give me a pen and ink.'

I'm afraid I startled him when I blurted out, 'I the cheque!' and when I gave him to understand I should never dream of accepting it, I am pretty he took me for a fool.

'And who is the young man?' said I, after a p 'you haven't told us that yet.'

'His name,' answered the lawyer, 'is Mr. Ed Clayton, of Huntley Court, ——shire. His fa with whom he quarrelled in September last, died days ago, and our young friend upstairs, his only comes into the property and some thirty thousa year.'

'There!' exclaimed my wife; 'didn't I tell George? Didn't I always say he was a real ge man?'

'You did, my dear,' replied I. 'And allow me to sir,' said I, turning to the lawyer, 'I don't care wh our friend Ned be of gentle birth or the reverse



this I know: a fairer or more upright and honourable young fellow never sat on a horse. I shall never see his like again at my establishment, I know.'

Well, gentlemen, it turned out quite correct all the lawyer had said, and when he got convalescent 'Swell Ned' left us to go and take possession of his property.

He's master of hounds now, and a great man in the county, I can tell you. I go and pay him a visit as regular as clockwork every year, just before the hunting season, and am made a rare fuss of, I can tell you, on those occasions.

Do I sell him many horses? Why, I believe if anybody was to suggest to him to buy one of someone else he'd go for that individual then and there. I'm sure he would!

ALL FOR THEM

THE DOCTOR'S STORY

Old George Topper, the horse-dealer, was in the middle of his favourite song, 'The High-mettled Racer,' one evening when I noticed Bob Magnum, in answer to a mysterious communication from his head-waiter, suddenly vacate the chair and leave the room. Presently, the song coming to an end, we were just in the act of applauding it, when Bob returned, ushering in a jolly-looking personage, the sight of whose face caused a general exclamation, accompanied by every outward sign of approval, of 'Why, it's the doctor!'

'Gentlemen,' said Bob, 'Doctor Goodenough has been to have a look at my head chambermaid, who was taken rather poorly this afternoon, and he now proposes to honour the Horse-shoe Club by spending an hour or so with us before he drives home. I think, gentlemen,' went on Bob, 'that I can assure him on your behalf that he is welcome, can I not?'

'Yes! yes! yes!' roared the company in one breath, to the accompaniment of much stamping of feet and banging of glasses.



'Welcome! Ah! as welcome as flowers in May, exclaimed old Farmer Wheatcroft.'

'He's a danged good veller, is the doctor,' remarked another stout agriculturist.

'He is so, and what's more, he can ride like blazes!' chimed in our huntsman.

He was decidedly a popular character was Dr. Good-enough. As the huntsman said, he was a good one to ride and fond of hunting, and, indeed, of all sorts of sports to a degree; owing, however, to his large practice, he was very seldom able to put in an appearance at the meet—not half so often as he desired, you may depend. The doctor's 'get up' in the hunting-field was not quite so 'correct' as it might be, consisting as it did of a felt hat, a rather baggy pepper-and-salt cutaway, Bedford cords, and a very imperfectly blacked pair of jack-boots, constructed with more regard to the comfort of the wearer than elegance; but when the hounds got away, many a swell in scarlet, 'got up to the nines,' was forced to admit that our sporting Doctor and his well-known Roman-nosed steed Sawbones were an uncommon bad pair to beat. They, in short, were 'rum ones to look at,' but 'good ones to go.'

And now behold him, a cigar in his mouth, and a glass of steaming whisky toddy at his elbow, settling himself down for an hour's quiet enjoyment. (Capital company is the doctor, I can tell you, and full of information and anecdote on all sorts of subjects.)

And behold him later on, being called upon by Bob Magnum for the usual song or story. In vain does the doctor protest and declare his inability to do either. Bob is inexorable. There is a large company present,

and the fine of glasses round in case of non-compliance with his demand will, he points out, mount up to something considerable. 'Ah, well,' laughed the doctor with an air of resignation, 'I see I am in for it, and as I never could sing a note in my life I must tell you a story.' And so saying, the jolly medico, having lit a fresh cigar and taken a refreshing sip at his toddy, commenced the following reminiscence:

I need scarcely tell you, gentlemen, that for a young man just entering the medical profession with a limited capital—in my case a *very* limited capital—it is an exceedingly difficult thing to get good value for your money when hunting for a practice. I really thought I never should make a start. At last, after much correspondence, many visits to different towns and consequently many disappointments, and much heart-burning—practices that looked most flourishing on paper, proving just the reverse when I came to look closely into them—I fixed on one at B——, a small and quiet watering-place on the South Coast. My sister, who came with me to keep house, was delighted with everything. 'Such a charming picturesque little house!' said she, 'and such a snug practice! You really are an extremely lucky fellow, Robert.' She was quite correct: it was as pretty a little house as ever you saw: smothered with roses in the summer, and with a capital view of the sea, one could wish for nothing better. Unfortunately my sister was equally correct in her estimation of the practice. It was snug. So snug, indeed, that, as another eminent member of our profession, whom you may probably have heard of—Mr.



Bob Sawyer, to wit—once remarked concerning his own little practice in Bristol, 'You might put all the profits into a wineglass, and cover them over with a gooseberry leaf.' The fact was the people of B—— were disgustingly healthy; they absolutely refused to be ill.

Nothing but a rattling epidemic would do me any good, that was very certain; and I longed for one accordingly, for which I was reproved by my sister in no measured terms for harbouring such wicked thoughts, as she termed it.

Well, the pair of us were sitting together over the fire one winter's evening discussing my prospects (and they looked anything but promising, I can assure you) over a cosy cup of tea, when a ring at the surgery-bell suddenly interrupted the conversation. Finishing my tea, I went out to see who it was, for I was seldom troubled with a patient at that time in the evening.

It proved to be little Polly Gibbons, the daughter of a lodging-house keeper in the town, whom I had once attended, with a message from her mother, requesting me to come and see a gentleman who had lately taken her parlours and was suddenly taken ill.

'And please, mother says, will you come at once, 'cos the gentleman's very bad,' said small Polly, who was out of breath with the haste she had made in coming.

'All right, my dear,' I replied, 'I'll come directly I've changed my coat. Meanwhile, Polly, come this way, and Miss Goodenough will give you a cup of tea, and then we'll be off to your mother's together. Hooray! somebody's ill at last,' said I to my sister, as I opened

at once sho
opened the d
liked to have
lodger's 'sudd
nipped her veri
I found my p
years old, but lo
attack of spasms
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B—— for rest a
lutely essential to l
the place, to reside
'I am well aware
he sadly, 'and why
I quite agreed, I t
sary to his well-being
would be as well if he
after him and cheer hi
'Have you no relativ
come to you?' I suggest
'Doctor,' said Mr C
name). I



I promised him, of course, wondering within myself what the mystery was, and shortly after took my departure, promising before I left to call and see my new patient in good time the following morning.

'Poor fellow!' thought I to myself as I walked home, 'you have a history, if one only knew, I feel sure. I wonder if I shall ever be taken into your confidence.'

I went to see Mr. Greenfield the next day, according to promise, and found him very much better, and very soon our acquaintance ripened into intimacy, and I found myself dropping into Sea View at all hours for a chat. During the winter months visitors at B—— were few and far between, therefore Mrs. Gibbons, the proprietress of the establishment, was regarded by her neighbours with jealousy, not to say hatred, at her unlooked-for good fortune at having let her parlours, as she called them.

'And such a lodger!' exclaimed the worthy woman, meeting me in the street one day, turning her eyes up as she spoke until you could see nothing but the whites. 'Such a lodger as he is, poor gentleman! So unwilling to give trouble, and that kind to my little fatherless gurl, you can't think.'

She was quite right: my patient was one of the gentlest, kindest-hearted men I ever came across. Though he had only been at B—— a little over a month, he had already made friends with many of the poor people in the place, and my sister was continually telling me of little acts of charity on his part that had come under her notice. Not only that, he was exceedingly good company, when in the vein, having evidently

seen a good deal of life at one time or another:
fore, whenever he asked me to come and dine wit
which he very frequently did, I was not at all lo
accept the invitation, the less so that I was sur
good dinner and a bottle of something good to w
down with, for my host was a most particular ma
liked everything of the best. He was a man, too,
very refined tastes, and Mrs. Gibbons' parlours
quickly after he had taken possession of them
to lose the lodging-housey look they usually wore.
dreadful case of wax fruit was banished from the m
piece, also the two equally aggressive vases that fl
it, one on each side. A sampler, too, the wo
Mrs. Gibbons herself when a little 'gurl,' as she
inform everyone with an air of pride, and the larg
hideous portrait in oil of the late Mr. Gibbons, lo
his stolidest, in a black satin stock and a crimson
waistcoat, with a decanter of port wine on the tab
front of him and a glass of the same generous flui
his hand, had to go.

'The portrait of my poor 'usband was took ju
year before he died,' would remark his relict in a te
voice, 'and was considered very like, especially the
glass in 'is 'and, which really stands out from the p
as nateral as life.'

Well, one evening, having had an unusually
little dinner, my host and I had drawn our chairs to
fire and lit our cigars, when Mr. Greenfield startle
considerably by abruptly saying, 'Doctor, did you
speak to a dead man?'

'Speak to a dead man! Why, no,' I replied, won
ing what on earth he was driving at.



'You never did, eh?' went on my host. 'Then let me inform you that you are addressing one now, at this moment.'

'What in the name of goodness do you mean?' exclaimed I, thinking really for the moment that Mr. Greenfield had taken leave of his senses.

'I mean what I say. You are speaking to a dead man,' replied Mr. Greenfield. 'You have been a true friend to me, Goodenough,' he continued, 'and though we have only known each other a short time, I feel as if we were old friends. It is because I have every confidence in you that I made up my mind this evening that I would confide to you the secret of my life—a secret that I pledge you my word has never yet been revealed to a living soul. Do you care to listen to it? If you would rather not, say so, and we will change the conversation.'

'On the contrary,' I replied eagerly, 'I am more than anxious to hear the story of your life, and I think,' I added, 'I can be trusted not to abuse the confidence you repose in me.'

'Good,' replied Mr. Greenfield. 'Fill up your glass, and you shall hear all about it.'

When my father died eight-and-twenty years ago, (said my host) I was but four-and-twenty. I had been through the usual course—Harrow, Christ Church, and all that sort of thing—and was by way of reading for the Bar, when I found myself suddenly my own master. My father had always been, though kind after a fashion, very strict with me, and had kept me very short of money; unfairly so, I thought. Indeed, had it not

been for my mother, who, of course, spoiled me, her only child, I don't know what I should have done occasionally for ready money. You may imagine, therefore, how I felt when I found myself owner of a nice estate and an income of nearly three thousand pounds a year. Now I will begin to 'live' in earnest, thought I to myself.

My mother, of whom I was as fond as she was of me, had the house for her life. 'But, of course, dear Frank,' she said, 'you will make it your home. You must get yourself a wife,' she would say laughingly. 'I should like to see your children playing about the old house before I die.' Now, as it happened, I had long ago given my heart away unknown to my parents. Dora Lindsay, one of the many daughters of a country rector, I need scarcely say, could not bring me much in the way of fortune; therefore, being well aware the match would not meet with the approval of my father, we mutually agreed to keep our engagement secret for a bit. There was now no longer occasion to do so, and six months after my father's death we were married, to my dear mother's intense satisfaction.

Five happy years we lived together, during which two little daughters were born to us, and then Dora was taken from me in giving birth to a third.

Always together as we had been, never scarcely out of one another's sight, you may imagine how terribly I felt her loss, and for many months I shut myself up and refused to go out into the world at all. At last I completely broke down and made myself seriously ill. My doctor insisted on my going right away, and just then an old college friend of mine, who had a house at



Newmarket, writing to invite me to stay with him for the autumn meetings, I at once accepted his offer.

I had no cause to regret doing so. The early hours —for we had to get up at daybreak almost to see the horses gallop—the fine bracing air for which Newmarket is famed, and the excitement of the racing itself, did me a world of good, not only physically, but mentally. Nor was that all. My visit turned out a profitable one in another sense, for, thanks to the good information I acquired, I came out a large winner. The end of it was, by the time the racing was over for the year and my visit came to an end, I had quite come to the conclusion that of all the pastimes that an Englishman could indulge in, racing was the most enjoyable, and I made a mental vow to become the possessor of a race-horse or two before I was many months older. Wild dreams of winning the Derby and other great events flitted across my brain on all occasions; in short, I was thoroughly inoculated with turf fever. Needless to say, I did not find it a very difficult matter to get a few horses together, and by the following June I found myself fairly launched upon the turf.

At first I was wonderfully lucky. Quite by chance I got hold, amongst my purchases, of a regular gold-mine in the shape of a three-year-old named Leporello. It had all along been supposed that five furlongs was his distance, but on getting home and trying him we discovered, to our great surprise, that he was a stayer of the first water. The Chester Cup of the following year fell to his share, and many other races, too numerous to mention—in fact, we won a fortune by him. It was a bad day for the stable when Leporello broke down

irretrievably after winning the Queen's Plate at field, you may depend.

With the old horse's secession from the turf, my luck seemed to have departed. I could neither race nor back a winner.

The end of it was that, exactly six years after embarked on the turf, I found that a continuous unparalleled run of bad luck had left me nearly p less. I was ruined, in short, stuck, lock, and k as the saying is. (I forget to mention that my m had died a year previously, and that a sister of my wife lived with me and took care of the children.)

The question was, what was to be done? and I no time in going up to town and consulting ou family lawyer on the subject.

The estate was mortgaged up to the hilt, an was exceedingly doubtful whether, when it was —an event which it was very certain was boun happen—the balance over and above what had raised on mortgage would suffice to pay off my fu liabilities. The old lawyer shook his head dubi when I gave him a rough estimate of the am owing.

'I fear, Mr. Frank,' said he, 'you will have to b life over again. It's a sad pity—a sad pity!'

He did not in the least exaggerate matters, for t was no getting away from the fact that I was t intents and purposes a pauper.

If it had been only myself who was to suffer I sh not have so much minded, as I was still a young and could, no doubt, make a living somehow; but t were my three motherless girls to be thought of.



Some time before I had insured my life for fifteen thousand pounds expressly for their benefit, but unless I died almost immediately, it would do them no good, for so far as I could see I should be unable to pay the premiums as they fell due. When I thought of it all I was very nearly distracted. Well, it wanted a week to the sale, and one glorious summer evening I thought I would take my rod and go down to the river to try for a trout, and see if I could not, by so doing, forget, for the time being at all events, some of my troubles. Accordingly, getting my rod, away I went, my three little girls, who were playing on the lawn, rushing up to kiss me, poor dears! as they always did when they saw 'daddy,' as they called me. Little did I think as I hugged them to me, one after the other, that it would be the last embrace I should ever give them in this world. But it was so ordained. In half an hour I had reached the river-side, and having tied a fly on, proceeded to fish. I whipped the stream for some time with but little success, and was just thinking of returning home, when I suddenly caught sight of an object which lay on the water, apparently prevented from floating by some rushes amongst which it was entangled.

At first I thought it was a dead pig, but all of a sudden it struck me that it was a human body. I could just reach it with my rod, and accordingly, using the butt-end, I succeeded in bringing whatever it was to land. It was, as I thought, a dead body—that of a man apparently about my own age. He had evidently been bathing, for he was stark naked, and probably, unable to swim, had got into one of the deep holes, of which



there were several just there, and so met his death. He was also certainly a stranger, for I knew everyone about the place, and it was no one I had ever seen.

I left him for a moment whilst I looked about for his clothes. Round a bend of the river, not a hundred yards off, I found them. Their owner was probably a Londoner down for a holiday, for there was a chimney-pot hat and black coat and waistcoat, all pointing to the denizen of the town. I stood and looked at them, thinking what I should do next, when a sudden thought came into my head, impelled by what means goodness only knows. Why should I not change clothes with the corpse? Put mine on him, and dress up in his. The poor fellow was not unlike me, and probably by the time he was found his face would not be recognisable. They would think it was me; the insurance company would pay over the fifteen thousand pounds, and my three little ones would be provided for in the future. I had, as luck would have it, bank-notes in my pocket to the tune of nearly a thousand pounds, so that I was all right as regarded myself.

And now to carry into effect my plan. I carried the clothes to where their late owner lay, and then, quickly divesting myself of all my own garments, dressed the corpse in them, and then put on his. They might have been made for me they fitted me so admirably.

My next action was to shove the dead body well in amongst the reeds, where it would not in all probability be found for some days, if then—at least, I hoped not. The fishing-rod I threw into the river also, and then,



having taken a good look round to see if the coast was clear, slunk off.

A small wood of mine ran right down to the water meadow I was in. To that I hied, and sitting down under a tree in its midst, I lit my pipe, and waited for nightfall. When it got dark I once more made a start, and at twelve o'clock found myself in a small town some thirteen miles off. Here I obtained a bed for the night in a small alehouse, where I remained all the next day, until nine o'clock at night, when I got into the train and came up to London, where I hired a couple of rooms in the south-east district for the time being.

A week afterwards I read in the papers of the discovery of my dead body. There was an inquest, of course, and I was on thorns for fear the jury might find and bring in a verdict of 'suicide.' However, it was all right, and they decided that it was a clear case of 'accidental death.' So my children's fortune was secured, and I once more breathed freely.

I ascertained afterwards from the county paper, a copy of which I procured, that the sale of my estate and effects fetched even less than we had anticipated. Had I not, therefore, taken the step I did, there would have been literally nothing for us to have lived upon. Now, however, thanks to the policy of insurance, my little children were well provided for in the future, and I had nothing, therefore, to fear on their account on the score of poverty.

The next thing to consider was what I was to do with myself. I must not be seen anywhere near my old haunts, that was certain, for fear of being recog-

nised. Accordingly, my first action was to
beard, which had the effect of altering my app
very much. I then betook myself to Paris, w
determined to remain permanently. It was w
was there that I got some information, quite by
with regard to a French horse engaged in our
witch and Cambridgeshire. Armed with a le
introduction to his trainer, I went to Chantil
day to have a look at him. A better-looking
never set eyes on, and the result was that I
him to win me a raker, not only for each race sepa
but for the double event as well. Barbe-Bleue
was the horse's name) won the Cesarewitch in a
and the shorter race by a head, and I landed
thousand pounds.

So my own fortune was secured, you see, as w
my children's—that is, if I did not make a fool o
self. Well, I lived comfortably enough in Paris.
the success I have just mentioned, I took to b
systematically, making a complete study of th
market. In this way I made a regular income.
came the Franco-Prussian War. Having a pretty
notion that things would not turn out quite so well
sanguine Parisians anticipated, I packed up my b
ings and came over to England, where I have bee
since. I tried a watering-place on the East Coa
some time, then I went inland for a bit; now
come here, and as I like the place, and the plac
me, here I intend to stop.

'There, doctor,' wound up Mr. Greenfield, '
my story. What do you think of it?'



Well, gentlemen, I gave him my opinion of it, and it was this: that now he was in affluent circumstances, owing to his successful turf operations, it seemed a pity that he should go down into the grave without once more seeing the children he had risked so much for.

'I had no doubt,' I told him, 'that I could arrange matters with the insurance company (he dreaded a prosecution). If he paid the back premiums and interest, I was certain,' I said, 'that the company would accept them.'

I was acquainted, too, with the medical man belonging to the company, which would, of course, considerably facilitate matters. I so worked upon his feelings, in short, that ere we parted that night we had settled everything. We were both to go up to London the next day, and I was to interview the insurance people straight away. If, as I expected, they came to terms, there was then nothing more to be done but to find out the whereabouts of Mr. Greenfield's three daughters.

At eleven o'clock the next morning I called in a fly at Sea View.

'I expect he's in his bedroom, doctor,' said the landlady with a curtsey, as she ushered me into the sitting-room, and saw he was not there. 'I'll knock, and let him know you're here.'

She knocked at the folding-door accordingly, but there was no response. She knocked again, and getting no reply, peeped in.

'He's kneeling by his bed, sir,' she whispered, hastily drawing in her head. 'Saying his prayers, most likely, poor, dear gentleman,' she added.



A chill came over my heart for a moment, as motioning her to be quiet, I stepped into the room. There was my patient, sure enough, on his knees by the side of the bed, with his head buried in his hands. Noiselessly I crept up to the kneeling figure, and stooping over it, raised the head. Alas! it was as I feared. Mr. Greenfield was dead.



A LASS THAT LOVED A SAILOR

THE GAMEKEEPER'S STORY

'WELL, Mr. Dilley, and how have you done with the pheasants this season?' inquired Bob Magnum one Saturday night of a stout, powerfully-built man of middle age, who sat sipping his gin-and-water and enjoying the harmony in a quiet, stolid sort of way.

With the exception of the drab cloth, mother-of-pearl-buttoned gaiters that encased his lower limbs, there was nothing about him in the slightest degree to indicate the gamekeeper. On the contrary, he had more the appearance of a prosperous farmer than anything else, with his chimney-pot hat, his blue bird's-eye neckcloth folded several times round his neck, and showing no collar, and his pepper-and-salt coat and waistcoat, instead of the baggy, many-pocketed velveteen shooting-jacket one always associates with members of his profession. His hair and whiskers—the latter bushy and brushed well forward—had a tendency to red, and his gray eyes were set rather close together, so close indeed as to lead one to doubt whether there was the usual space of an eye's length between them.



This peculiarity was probably the reason for his being the first-rate shot he was. Gamekeepers as a rule are indifferent performers with the gun, and certainly quickness in shooting is the exception rather than the rule with them. John Dilley, though, was not only a good shot, but one of the quickest I ever saw.

As I have already observed, John Dilley did not look like a gamekeeper, but he was one for all that, and as good a one as you would find anywhere. A great favourite with his master, old Sir Henry Welman, he constantly shot with him; and as I was a somewhat frequent guest at Farley Court, I had many an opportunity of watching the head-keeper's performances with his gun. Sir Henry used to say, with a chuckle, that he had only been angry with John Dilley once in his life, and that was one day out partridge-shooting, when they both fired at the same bird at the same moment, and John claimed it, and, what is more, stuck to it that he was right, in spite of his master's positive assertion that it was his. Sir Henry was rather put out at the moment, but he quickly turned the incident into ridicule, and for years afterwards never ceased to chaff his old servant about it.

'It *was* my bird, for all Sir Henry may declare to the contrary,' said John to me one day when his master had been harder on him than usual. 'I wish, though,' he added, 'I had allowed him to have his way in the matter, that I do, for he does chaff me so about it. I don't believe,' wound up John, with a comical shake of his head, 'Sir Henry 'll forget it to his dying day, that I don't.'

To see John in his glory, though, was when Sir



Henry had one of his big shoots on. On these festive occasions it was an impressive sight to behold John placing the guns and marshalling the beaters.

'When you hear me blow my whistle,' he would say, addressing the latter, 'on you go, and be sure and keep in line!'

And woe betide the beater who did not obey his orders, or who, in the excitement of the moment, mistaking a blackbird for a woodcock, would holloa accordingly. On that occurring, John would be more sarcastic than abusive, finding it possibly more effective.

'What!' he would say in a sorrowful tone, '*you* been brought up in the country all your life and don't know a woodcock from a sparrer! Well, I *am* ashamed of yer, that I am!'

At rearing pheasants and breaking-in retrievers he has not an equal in the county, or indeed anywhere else; and, best of all, he is one of the few keepers I ever came across who manages to have foxes as well as pheasants. Sir Henry's coverts are always a sure find, and when the hounds met at Farley Court the keeper would turn out on horseback, either on an old hunter of his master's, or on a stubby pony, his own property. If complimented, as he often was, on his always having a fox for them whenever the hounds came, he would reply that there was in his opinion no reason why pheasants and foxes should not go together.

'Half these chaps,' he would say, referring to gamekeepers generally, 'don't feed the foxes, don't you see, that's where it is, and so, naturally, the poor things looks elsewhere for their wittles, just the same as you or I should. They get hungry just like the rest of us.



Now, whenever there's a vixen laid up in our woods, I looks after her and her family, just as if she was a young married woman in a similar condition, taking her mice and young rabbits every day a'most. I don't say the foxes don't take a hen pheasant off her nest occasionally, because, of course, they do. Foxes are so gallus mischievous, you know. But take 'em all in all, they don't do half the harm they're made out to do, in my opinion. There's a good many two-legged foxes do a precious sight more mischief, you may depend, and the four-legged uns get all the credit of it.'

And now, having sketched John Dilley's portrait for the benefit of the reader, you must please imagine him called on by Bob Magnum for a song or story.

The keeper, after considering for a moment, chooses the latter alternative, and forthwith breaks cover with the following reminiscence:

Before I came to live with Sir Henry Welman, I was head-keeper to a very rich gentleman named Mr. Conyers, in ——shire. My master was a great game-preserver, though, oddly enough, he never shot himself; indeed, they did say he had never fired a gun off in his life. He generally, though, had his house full of company during the winter months for the hunting and shooting, so I suppose it was for the look of the thing that he preserved the large quantity of pheasants that he did. I think, too, he liked to know that a bigger bag was made at his battues than at his neighbour's.

He was mighty particular, I can tell you, as to who



he asked to shoot; a bad or even indifferent performer was never asked again. Mr. Conyers was a widower, with an only daughter, one of the loveliest young creatures you ever set eyes on, and as good as she was beautiful.

I suppose she got her amiability from her mother, who, I believe, she took after very much; she certainly did not get it from her father, for Squire Conyers, as he was called, was one of the most morose, cruel-dispositioned men I ever came across. No one liked him, neither rich nor poor. Even dogs never took to him, and they are pretty good judges as a rule. In short, I think there was only one person in the world who had the least regard for him, and that was Miss Violet—bless her innocent heart! I believe one cause of Mr. Conyers' bad temper—probably the principal one—was that his wife had not borne him a son, the consequence of which was that at his death the whole of his estates, by the law of entail, went to a distant relative, a cousin several times removed. It was to the son of this cousin, Mr. Albert Blackstone, so I was given to understand, that the Squire had made up his mind to marry his daughter, in order to keep the estates in the family, and with this object in view he was perpetually inviting the young man to stay at Marden Chase.

Miss Violet, however, to the great anger of her father, would have nothing to say to her cousin, and many and violent were the scenes between her and the Squire in consequence, so the indoor servants said. They all of them, men and women alike, detested 'Old Surly,' as they called their master, and Mr. Albert was



not much more popular with them either, the insolent, overbearing manner he adopted to everyone beneath him in the social scale being anything but calculated to make him either liked or respected.

He had a vile temper, which he was good enough on one occasion to give me the benefit of. He and I were out one afternoon by ourselves to kill a few brace of pheasants for the house, and Mr. Albert, never a good performer at the best of times, shot, if possible, worse than usual. He stamped his foot, ground his teeth, and cursed and swore like a trooper as pheasant after pheasant flew away unhurt. At last, a bird that he had fired both barrels at and missed handsomely flew my way, so, raising my gun, I brought him down. To use an old shooting expression, gentlemen, I 'wiped his eye' for him. He disliked me, I could see, and he had for some time been trying for an excuse for unbottling his pent-up wrath, and now he had got it. Accordingly he lost no time in letting fly at my devoted head all the fiercest invectives at his command. The foulest-tongued bargee that ever was born never used worse language than did Mr. Albert Blackstone at me that afternoon. I can assure you, gentlemen, that it was all I could do to keep control over my own temper. I certainly never felt so strongly inclined to knock a man down in my life as I did him.

However, I said nothing at the time, and but just let him run on, and when he had finished quietly turned on my heel and walked straight home. The next morning I went up to the house, and requesting to see the Squire, told him of his nephew's conduct towards me the previous day, and gave him clearly to understand that



I declined accompanying the young man shooting again. The Squire for a wonder took my remarks in good part, probably because he was afraid of losing me just at an awkward time, and promised to speak to Mr. Albert on the subject. Now, as I have already told you, Miss Violet, much as her father desired the match, resolutely declined to have anything to say to her cousin, and for the very good reason why—because she was in love with, and secretly engaged to another, young Mr. Edward Forrester, the only son of the Vicar of the parish, a Lieutenant in the navy, and as good-looking and dashing a young chap as you would wish to come across, and a particular favourite of mine, as indeed he was with everyone he came across. He had no money, of course (the right sort somehow always seem deficient in that respect), though I believe he had prospects hereafter from an uncle. Miss Violet and he had known each other from children, and it was scarcely to be wondered at that they should grow fond of one another. Anyhow, it is very certain that she loved the Lieutenant, and it was equally certain that in consequence her father hated him; in fact, he forbade him to come near the place. The Lieutenant was now supposed to be with his ship, so the coast was clear for his rival.

The last time he got leave and came down to stay at the Vicarage, he, of course, daren't go near the Chase; but there was nothing to prevent his coming to my cottage, and it was a singular thing that he generally found occasion to pay me a visit on some pretext or another every day; and it was still more singular that about the same time Miss Violet would be seen tripping

along in the same direction—to see my wife, no doubt.

In fact, my wife (who had formerly been housemaid at the Vicarage) aided and abetted this pretty pair of lovers by every means in her power. When the young sailor was away on the sea, it was to us that he forwarded his love-letters, you may be sure. And it was us who were entrusted with the posting of the return letters to him.

I think it was the third morning after my row with Mr. Albert that, coming in to breakfast, I was met by my wife with the news that she had got a letter from Mr. Ned.

'And a nice letter it is, John,' says she, 'and that full of a scheme—— Well, there! it beats Guy Fawkes and the Gunpowder Plot hollow.'

With this she handed me over the letter to see for myself.

In it the Lieutenant said he had got leave rather unexpected, that he had heard accidentally that his rival was at the Chase, making 'strong running,' as he called it, and that he couldn't stand it any longer. So he had bought himself a smock frock, leather gaiters—the regular rig-out of a labourer, in fact—together with a red wig and beard, and his intention was to dress himself up in this disguise, and come down the very next day. He should tramp it over from a distant station, and would take a lodging in the village, and he should depend on me, he said, for finding him employment of some sort—beating or such-like—every day. He wound up: 'I'm sick of all this worry and suspense, Jane' (he always called my wife Jane), 'and this time I am deter-



mined to bring matters to a climax, even if we are obliged to make a runaway affair of it.'

'And quite right, too, and very proper,' observed my wife, 'and the sooner the pretty dears are off to Gretna Green the better, in my opinion. If that wicked old Squire would only die,' said she spitefully, 'everything would come as right as ninepence.'

Well, the next day, just about dinner-time, a knock came at the door, and there was our young sailor, grinning and showing his white teeth through a great red moustache and beard. Such a get-up as you never saw, for all the world like a play-actor! He'd got a white smock, yellow gaiters, and a bundle strung on a stick and carried over his shoulder, just like an ordinary labourer. In he came—Ben Smith, as he calls himself—and, flopping down in my arm-chair, put his head back and roared with laughter, in which my wife and I joined in quite as heartily. When we had had our laugh out, we all three sat down to dinner, and the way the Lieutenant pitched into the rabbit-pie the wife had made expressly for him did one good to see. We had arranged it all for him splendid, I told him.

There was some wood in the outhouse all ready for him to chop; there was a bed to be had at old Mother Brister's, who kept the turnpike on the Bunstaple Road; a large party were to shoot the Home Wood on the morrow, so that he would be in request to assist in beating; and last, but not least, Miss Violet, who was in the secret, was coming up to our cottage that very afternoon on pretence of seeing my wife about something or other. At half-past three Miss Violet arrived, according to promise, and the lovers had a good long



talk together, you may depend. The result of this conversation must have been satisfactory to Mr. Ned, for I don't think I ever saw him in such high spirits as he was after his sweetheart had taken her departure. And he went in for chopping wood to such a tune, singing and whistling all the time, that I told him he wouldn't have any left for another day if he went on like that.

He slept that night at the Turnpike, and, true to his new calling, was up and at my cottage soon after daylight. He declared he had never slept so sound in his life. We had a good breakfast for him, you may depend; and, having done ample justice to it, he resumed his wig and beard, and went out and chopped wood and smoked his pipe until it was time to start to the Home Wood.

'And whatever you do, Mr. Ned,' said I, as we neared the covert, and saw the underkeepers and the rest of the beaters—quite a small army of them—standing waiting for us, 'pray be careful and keep out of Mr. Albert's way as much as you can, for I am not at all sure that he don't begin to smell a rat. I was told this morning that he was seen lurking about yesterday afternoon in the wood not far from my cottage, and it is quite on the cards he was watching Miss Violet. If he had a suspicion that you were here, it would spoil everything.'

He promised me he would be on his guard, and then slouched off and joined the beaters. Upon my word, he acted the character first-rate—a regular play-actor couldn't have done it better. The way he slouched about and talked the country dialect was really as



natural as life. By-and-by the house-party arrived and with them, of course, Mr. Albert Blackstone, looking in a worse temper than usual.

'Get out, you brute!' was his reply, accompanied by a kick, to my retriever, Bess, when she, poor thing, went up in her friendly way to greet him.

'You cowardly snob!' I heard Ben Smith, who was standing close by, mutter to himself, as poor old Bess, giving a howl of pain, retreated to her usual place at my heels.

Fearful of a scene—for somehow I could not get rid of the idea that something out of the common would happen that day—I lost no time in directing the six guns to their posts in the covert, and having seen them all right and in their proper places, I gave the word of command to the beaters, and the fun began. What with the firing, the shouting of the beaters and one thing or another, I clean forgot Ben Smith for a while; however, when we had been at it for almost an hour he suddenly slouched up close to me and whispered:

'I say, John, I believe I am twigged. I caught my beard in a hazel stem just now and off it came, as ill-luck would have it, just as I had got close up to where Albert Blackstone stood, and I believe he saw the whole thing. It might have been fancy, of course, but I could have sworn he gave a start of surprise as if he recognised me.'

There was no time to discuss the matter further, and Ben Smith went on beating as if nothing had happened. And now, gentlemen, I'll tell you of as nice a piece of villainy as ever you heard.

It was just luncheon time—indeed, the cart had just



arrived from the house—and we were just finishing the beat (the line of beaters, in fact, was within fifteen yards or so of the ride in which were stationed the guns), when I saw Ben Smith rush forward to pick up a rabbit which, shot, poor thing, in its hind-quarters, was dragging itself away as fast as it could. He was in the very act of stooping to seize it when bang went a gun in the path, just in front of him, and with a terrible cry the disguised Lieutenant, clutching his breast with both hands, fell forward on the ground.

I rushed headlong into the ride, and there, as I expected, was Mr. Albert Blackstone, pale as death, and with the most diabolical expression I think I ever saw on a man's face, just slipping a fresh cartridge into his gun.

'Did you fire that shot?' I exclaimed.

'Of course I did,' he stammered; 'fired at a wounded rabbit. Did—did—you pick one up?'

This he said, or rather gasped, with an attempt to appear cool and collected, which, however, did not go down with me, for I could see that his hands trembled so he could hardly hold his gun.

I fairly lost my temper at this, and I blurted out in reply:

'You're nothing better than a cowardly liar, Mr. Albert Blackstone! It was no rabbit you fired at, as you are perfectly well aware, but your rival, Mr. Edward Forrester, a man worth twenty such as you; and if he's dead, mark my word you're his murderer, and if you don't swing for it, it shan't be my fault.'

And, shaking my fist in the coward's white face, for I was downright mad for the moment, I once



more plunged into the wood to look after poor Mr. Ned.

The charge of shot had entered his chest apparently, just like a ball; and, so far as we could judge, there seemed but small hope for him. There was no use concealing his identity any longer, and Mr. Conyers' guests were soon aware who the wounded man really was.

Some of them knew him personally, and all by repute; and being well aware of the rivalry that existed between the Lieutenant and Mr. Albert, they naturally looked rather askance at that gentleman. In fact, I could see plainly enough that they did not for a moment place any credence in the numerous excuses he gave for the accident, as he termed it. The first thing to be done was to take the pony out of the luncheon cart and send a boy on his back to the nearest doctor; we then took a gate from a neighbouring field off its hinges, and lifted the wounded man thereon, with a view to transporting him as quietly as possible to his father's vicarage. We had done so, and were just about to start, when who should suddenly appear in our midst but Miss Violet. The look of horror that came over her sweet face directly she caught sight of the prostrate body of her lover I shall never forget to my dying day; neither do I think that Mr. Albert Blackstone will efface from his memory in a hurry the glance of mingled hatred and scorn she threw at him (for I had told her in as few words as possible how it had happened). The guilty wretch fairly cowered beneath it. Slowly we marched along to the Vicarage, Miss Violet, pale and cold-looking as a statue, holding



her sweetheart's hand in hers. She made no secret of her love now.

At last we reached the Vicarage, and were met at the door by poor Mr. Ned's old father, who wrung his hands in mute anguish when he beheld his son.

Five minutes after the doctor arrived and examined his patient, who by this time had been laid in his own bed. How anxiously we all awaited his verdict you can guess.

At last it came.

'Youth and a good constitution may pull him through, but——' And the doctor shook his head doubtfully, without finishing the sentence he had begun.

That evening Squire Conyers sent a servant to the Vicarage to inquire after Mr. Ned, and a note to his daughter requesting her to return home at once.

Miss Violet wrote a note back, in which she told her father plainly that she did not intend leaving her lover, and asking for some clothing to be sent to her at once.

Mr. Conyers, who, the servants said, was by this time wild with rage, sent another note to his daughter, to the effect that unless she obeyed his orders she should never darken his doors again.

Miss Violet tore the letter up, and requested the messenger to say that there was no answer.

An hour after the Squire was seized with a fit, and before a doctor could arrive was dead. And do you know, gentlemen, I don't think there was a single moist eye in the district when the news became known. I really don't believe Mr. Conyers had a friend in the world.



Did Mr. Ned recover?

I should rather think he did, indeed, and married sweet Miss Violet within six months.

The Chase, as I have already explained, all went away from her through being entailed; but the whole of her father's money came to her, the Squire not having had time to alter his will, as no doubt he intended to have done.

Mr. Albert, as next heir, lived at the Chase for a time, and was nearly as unpopular as his uncle. I need scarcely say I gave warning to leave directly after the Squire's death, and was lucky enough to get the situation with Sir Henry that I now hold, and a better master I never wish to serve.

Mr. Ned stuck to the navy, notwithstanding the fact that through his wife he had plenty of money to live the life of a country gentleman had he so chosen.

He commands an ironclad now, and will shortly be an Admiral, I hear. Her headquarters are at Plymouth, where he has a beautiful place. I can speak with certainty, for the missus and I go there every summer as regularly as clockwork to pay him and his lovely wife and children a visit.

It is a standing agreement 'twixt him and me that whenever I get too old for gamekeeping my wife and I are to go and finish our days with him; but, as I say to him, 'I'm as fond of my profession, Mr. Ned, as you are of yours, and I don't intend to give it up yet awhile, you may depend.'



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a sandy colour; his raiment was inclined to be gorgeous, not to say loud; and a superfluity of jewellery of the flash order—horse-shoes predominating—adorned his person. Lastly, he possessed the highest possible opinion of himself—an opinion, I regret to say, not shared by the world in general, certainly not by me. In short, take him altogether, he combined in his own person as much vulgar assurance and impudence as would have supplied a dozen ordinary mortals.

The circulars he sends out to his customers, setting forth the virtues of the different wines in his capacious cellars, are sublime in their way, and of themselves ought to make their author's fortune; we suspect, though, the enterprising Mr. Hicks's chief customers are the farmers round about, who purchase from him their brandy, whisky, and gin, and the sweet sherry and fruity port they so much affect as a rule.

He used to pester me so for an order that at last I was afraid to pass his shop.

'I very much wish, Captain,' he would say (he always persisted in calling me 'Captain'), 'you'd step in some afternoon when just passing, and sample my champagne. I've some Grípes père et fils of Epernay manufactured expressly for yours truly. I've got some port, too, I should like you to try—not an 'eadache in an 'ogshead of it—and some 'ock also I think you'll say there's no 'arm in.'

In an evil moment I consented, and I *did* sample the Grípes pere et fils and the port. I don't know about the headache, but I will answer for the stomachache that followed on. I had, indeed, a benefit.

This, then, is a slight sketch of the Club member who



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'Stories! h
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say this arrangement suited my book down to the ground, the fresh sea air and the gay company who thronged the principal promenades and drives being a decided change for the better from old Cruncher's stuffy, ill-ventilated office, and the sight of the bucolic-looking folk one perpetually saw mooning about the streets of poor slow old Potterton.

Mine was ever a cool, calculating nature, gents, from boyhood upwards, and I had not been a whole day in the place before I had arrived at one conclusion, which was, that one of the pleasantest professions that a man could take up was that of a riding-master. As I leaned over the rails of the fashionable promenade with a two-penny cigar in my mouth (it wouldn't run to a better in those days), and watched bevy after bevy of charming young ladies, perhaps as many as twenty sometimes altogether, cantering along, chattering and laughing, the riding-master in their midst, now touching the neatly-gloved little hand of the charmer on his right, under pretence of showing her how to hold the reins (the sly dog!), now whispering soft nothings into the rosy ear of the pretty girl on the other side, I thought to myself, 'You lucky dog! what wouldn't I give to be in your place!' And before the party were well out of sight another lot of little dears would come tittuping up. My poor heart, gents, I give you my sacred word, was in quite a dangerous state of agitation the whole of the blessed day. I am not a vain man, but by the close of the day, when I had had a good stare at every riding-master in the place, I decided within myself that there was not one amongst the lot who could hold a candle to yours truly in the way of

personal appearance. In turf phraseology, I could have given every man Jack of 'em a stone and a beating. There was no possible cause to doubt it, as the chap says in 'The Gondoliers.'

When I got back to my hotel and looked at myself in the glass in my bedroom, on going there to tittivate myself up a bit before dinner, I was more convinced than ever.

''Arrington 'Icks (the wine-merchant knocked his 'h's' about sadly), deagh boy,' says I, soliloquizing to myself, 'you're a good-looking chap, and no mistake about it, and it is your bounden duty not to waste your beauty on the desert hair.'

And with that, gents, I went downstairs and ordered a pint of sham to wash down my dinner with, and enable me the better to work out a scheme for the future that had been running through my brain all the afternoon.

You'd like to know, no doubt, what the idea was. I'll gratify your wish in a very few words: it was to cut the law and set up as a riding-master on my own account.

Well, I finished my pint of sham and ordered another, and as I sipped it the prospect got rosier and rosier every moment.

'There must be heiresses by the dozen amongst all those school-gals,' thought I to myself, 'and if one of 'em *should* take it into her pretty head to fall in love with her riding-master, what is to prevent her marrying the man of her choice, I should like to know? A fellow can't help his good looks, that's very certain.'



In short, gents, that bottle of sham settled my future effectually. By the time I rose from the dinner-table the legal profession, to all intents and purposes, had lost a distinguished member, for I had quite settled in my own mind that directly I had served the writ on the runaway swell, and returned home, I would give old Cruncher a week's notice.

The next morning, having ascertained that the young sportsman in question had returned, I served him with the document in question, as he was sitting at breakfast in the best sitting-room of the best hotel in the place. (The young sparks who don't pay their bills always stay at the best hotels and have the best of everything, I notice.)

I regret to have to record that, notwithstanding that I performed my disagreeable duty in the most gentlemanlike manner possible, he returned my politeness by being most abominably rude, not to say insulting. Addressing me as a confounded snob, he informed me that it was precious lucky for me that he had not his boots on at the moment, otherwise he would have done himself the pleasure of kicking me downstairs. As it was, he contented himself by setting his nasty brute of a bull-terrier at me, who went at my legs with such vigour that I ran downstairs considerably faster than I had come up, to the inexpressible delight of the waiters and other domestics belonging to the place, and my proportionate disgust. Why is it the lower orders are always so pleased when any misfortune happens to a myrmidon of the law, I wonder? I believe, if I had tumbled down the whole flight of stairs and the brute of a dog had tried to throttle me when I got to the

bottom, not a mother's son of 'em would have int
to save my life.

I need scarcely say I was now more disgusted
the law than ever, and, returning to Potterto
same afternoon, before nightfall I had tender
resignation to old Cruncher, who accepted it i
usual matter-of-fact way, his only remark bei
express his opinion that I was an ass on my info
him of my intention of setting up as an instruc
riding.

There was no difficulty about money, as I ha
best part of a thousand pounds at my commanc
me by my father; the only question was whe
go to.

After a deal of consideration and a lot of n
spent in visiting all the most likely towns fo
purpose, I finally decided on the beautiful cit
Tubbeville, whose hot springs, so beneficial in cas
gout and rheumatism, are of world-wide reputa
causing multitudes of invalids suffering from these
plaints to flock there in the spring and winter wi
view of alleviating their sufferings. Tubbeville,
was cramful of colleges and schools of all sorts, an
consequence was a favourite resort for parents who
children to educate. On inquiry I ascertained
there were only one or two riding-masters in the p
and these I quickly determined to try and cut o
possible. Accordingly I engaged some premises,
chased half a dozen horses and a couple of ponies-
former stood me in about thirty pounds apiece—bo
myself a complete rig-out of clothes—being very
ticular as to my hat, and breeches, and boots—had



cards printed, and having distributed the same broadcast through the town, awaited the result. I am bound to say that when three weeks had elapsed, and I had only had one pupil, and that a nasty little boy of tender years, who tumbled off his pony in the park the very first go off, and raised such a hullabaloo in consequence as to cause quite a crowd to assemble, I began to feel a bit anxious. The horses were eating their heads off, and nothing for 'em to do. Servants had to be paid; Christmas coming on too.

The prospect looked anything but promising, I can tell you. The fact was that there was no money in Tubbeville. The invalids, of course, couldn't ride if they wanted to, and the majority of the other visitors to the town were people who came to reside there with a view of economizing rather than spending money—officers on half-pay, retired Indians, and such-like. As for the bevies of young ladies, the sight of which had so excited my admiration at the seaside town I had visited, they were not to be seen at Tubbeville. I really was never so deceived in a place in my life. Riding exercise, too, admitted by the faculty to be so conducive to the health, especially for the young! 'Why, the parents and guardians in this beautiful town ought to be downright ashamed of themselves!' I would find myself exclaiming in a fit of righteous indignation a hundred times in the day.

Well, one fine morning I was standing at the entrance to my yard, with my hands in my pockets, and thinking it was just about time for me to advertise the nags for sale and clear out of Tubbeville before what little was left of the money was spent, when a

smart-looking maid-servant approached, who, inquiring if I was Mr. Harrington Hicks, and being answered in the affirmative, at once handed me a note, which I as promptly opened and read. It was dated from a house in the most fashionable part of Tubbeville, and ran thus:

'Miss Mosetta being desirous of taking some lessons in riding, will thank Mr. Harrington Hicks to call on her at three o'clock this afternoon to arrange for same.'

'H'm! Slightly arbitrary, but highly satisfactory,' I muttered to myself.

'Have the goodness to tell your mistress that I will be sure and wait upon her without fail at the time appointed, will you, my dear?' said I to the pretty slavey, at the same time slipping half a crown into her hand. 'By the way,' I added insinuatingly, as an afterthought, just as she was turning to go, 'is your mistress a *young* lady? I merely ask, so that I shall know how to mount her when she goes out riding, that's all.'

'Well, she ain't young, and she ain't old. Betwixt and between like,' answered the maid, with a giggle. 'She ain't very pretty neither, but she's got 'eaps of money. I believe she could buy 'em all up in Tubbeville if she chose. The only wonder,' wound up this communicative young person, 'is that she ain't got hold of a sweetheart with all her money before now; but she ain't. She and Miss Brand, her companion, live quite alone, and not a soul ever comes near the house but the doctor, and he's a married man.'

Having delivered herself of this piece of intelligence,



she gave me a pert little nod, and tripped off gaily with my message to her mistress.

At three o'clock to the minute I presented myself, looking my smartest, you may depend, at Belvidere House, and inquired for Miss Mosetta, and was informed by an austere-looking butler, who opened the door, that she was at that moment engaged, but that Miss Brand would see me. He then ushered me into a handsome drawing-room—splendidly furnished—in which sat a masculine-looking female with a moustache, who I judged rightly to be the lady in question. Motioning me to a chair, she at once proceeded to business. Miss Mosetta, she proceeded to inform me, was a young lady of fortune in delicate health, and had been recommended by her doctor to take horse exercise every day. As, however, she had scarcely ever ridden, and had not got a horse or pony of her own, it was deemed advisable—at first, at all events—that she should receive some tuition.

With that object in view, then, she had applied to me in the matter, and as some of Miss Mosetta's requirements would necessitate special arrangement, she thought it as well to see me personally beforehand.

'In the first place,' said Miss Brand, 'Miss Mosetta must have a horse—the best you have in your stable—reserved entirely for her own use. Nobody else is even to mount it. In order to remove any difficulty on that score,' she added, 'put your price on the horse and Miss Mosetta will buy it outright. Secondly, you will be required to call here for her every morning at half-past ten o'clock and devote at least three hours to her—by which, I mean,' explained Miss Brand, 'that Miss

Mosetta desires no other ladies to accompany her rides. Should she wish to go out again in the afte nothing must stand in the way. You under These are our requirements, Mr. Hicks, and it is to accept or decline them as you think fit. As to you have only to name them. Miss Mosetta is aware that she cannot expect to take up your for nothing, and is fully prepared to pay accordin

At that moment the door burst open, and in bu as extraordinary looking a female as ever I saw i life.

Imagine a short dumpy woman, with a fat face, twinkling black eyes, jet-black 'air, muddy comple no chin to speak of, full lips, and a very prominent of decidedly Jewish pattern, and there you have Mosetta, for she it was. She was attired in a b blue habit, indifferently made, and she sported on head a chimney-pot hat, which she had so jammed that it looked as if it meant coming right over her every moment.

'My duck of a Brandy Wandy!' she screamed, r ing up to Miss Brand, and giving her a sounding on the cheek, which that stately lady received with greatest composure imaginable. 'My duck of a Bra Wandy! Do look at my lovely legs and tell me w you think of 'em.'

With that, tripping into the middle of the ro she lifted up her habit skirt, and shooting out a fat leg, encased in a patent-leather boot, struck attitude.

'There!' she exclaimed; 'what do you think of t my cat? That's something like a leg for a boot, i



it? Don't say it isn't, or I'll scratch that glass eye of yours out and throw it out of the window.'

'Very elegant indeed—most elegant,' replied Miss Brand, without moving a muscle of her countenance. 'And now, Maria,' she continued, with a wave of her mittened hand towards me, 'this is Mr. Hicks, who is going to teach you how to ride.'

'Oh, that's Mr. Hicks, is it,' answered Miss Mosetta, marching straight up to me and looking up into my face. 'And pray,' said she, 'what do *you* think of my lovely legs? Tell me truly, or I won't love, honour, and obey you.'

'Beautiful! lovely indeed!' I blurted out, scarcely knowing what to say.

'Of course they are!' she exclaimed; 'give me your hand, my hearty,' and with that she shook me warmly by the hand and burst into a peal of wild laughter.

She had great teeth like a horse, and when she grinned, upon my soul I could not help thinking of the Cheshire cat. Suddenly the laughter ceased, her face assumed a grave expression, and she walked slowly up to me, and catching me by the whiskers (I wore them just then rather long), got my ear down to a level with her mouth.

'You said just now,' she whispered, 'that my legs were lovely. Don't tell anybody, but you shall see 'em twinkle in the polka.'

And with that she waltzed up to a grand piano which stood in a corner of the room, and sat down and played the opening bars of George Grossmith's well-known song, 'Have you seen me Dance the Polka?'

And then, suddenly jumping up, she danced wildly round the room singing the words of the song all the while at the top of her voice. I believe she would have danced away until she fell from exhaustion had not Miss Brand suddenly interposed, and putting her hand on her shoulder, bade her stop, which she did instantly.

'That will do, my dear,' said she; 'and now, please, say good-bye to Mr. Hicks, and go and change your habit, and we'll have tea.'

To my astonishment, Miss Mosetta—all signs of excitement now gone—held out her hand to me, and walked quietly out of the room without a word.

'Miss Mosetta is a little eccentric,' coolly remarked Miss Brand, as the door shut on that lady. ('You never spoke a truer word than that, old girl,' thought I.) 'And now, Mr. Hicks,' she continued, 'let us talk business once more. You have seen Miss Mosetta. Do you agree to my proposals?'

I need scarcely tell you, gentlemen, that I agreed to everything, and what is more, had it all down in black and white on the spot. I was to have two guineas a morning for my services, and I kindly consented to sell my chestnut horse, Rufus, to Miss Mosetta for one hundred and fifty guineas down. (If he hadn't been fired all round, I'd have asked two hundred. As it was, I hadn't the cheek.) Miss Brand wrote me a cheque on the spot for the amount, and thirty guineas extra for a saddle and bridle, after which I took my departure with my tongue in my cheek and my cheque in my pocket, having pledged my word to ride up to the house at 10.30 the following morning to take Miss Mosetta out for her first ride.



It was the best day's work I ever did in my life, and I drank a whole bottle of sham when I got home instead of my usual cup of tea, by way of celebrating the event. Well, gents, true to my promise, punctually at the hour appointed on the morrow I turned up at Belvidere House with the horses, and having hoisted the lady with the lovely legs into the saddle (she gave such a bound, I remember, that she nearly tumbled over the other side), and showed her how to hold the reins, away we went, old Rufus ambling away in his very best rocking-horse style. Well, the game went on without a check for a couple of months. I drew my fourteen guineas a week as regular as clockwork, besides what I charged Miss M. for Rufus's keep, hire of a man to look after him, etc. She got more eccentric every day, and the things she used to say to me sometimes you'd never believe. At last one day things came to a climax. Shall I ever forget it? It was in the spring, and I had taken her for a ride to some woods some miles from Tubbeville to show her the primroses. I was just remarking what a fine sight it was, and how pretty the wood looked, when she suddenly screamed out:

'Who killed Cock Robin? I, said the Sparrow, with my bow and arrow. Hicksey, my loved, loved Hicksey Wicksey, have you ever felt the darts of Cupid? Because, if you haven't, feel 'em now and tell me you love me.'

Here was the chance I had long dreamt of come at last. Was I to throw it away? Certainly not! Go in and win, Harrington Hicks, whispered my evil genius in my ear.

'I do!' I replied with as much fervour as I could, putting my hand on my heart, as I had seen lovers do on the stage.

And upon my word I meant what I said. I *did* love her—at least, if I did not love her, I loved her money, so it was all the same.

Directly I uttered those two little words, my lady threw her arms round my neck and pretty nearly dragged me off my horse. The way she went on was a caution. I shall be devilish glad when the knot's tied, I thought to myself, if it's going to be like this every day. Well, I quieted her down at last, and then nothing must satisfy her but that we must exchange rings. With that she tore off her glove, and taking a magnificent diamond hoop ring off her finger, gave it to me, which, as it was much too small to go on my hand, I put in my pocket. I then gave her mine in exchange, a wretched old bloodstone signet. Not a bad swap for me, thought I, as she first kissed it fondly, and then put it on her finger, for which it was, of course, much too large. I thought we should never have got home that day; however, at last the ride came to an end, and I hastened back to dinner, half beside myself with joy and excitement. Such plans I formed for the future, you can hardly believe—a yacht at Cowes; a moor in Scotland; a long string of racehorses in training. I possessed 'em all, bless you, and a house in Belgrave Square into the bargain.

Alas! how suddenly and ruthlessly our hopes are sometimes shattered in this world!

The next morning I was seated at breakfast, when the servant came in with a note in her hand.



'From Belvidere,' she said, 'and the gentleman's waiting for an answer.'

'From Miss M., of course,' thinks I, my hand trembling so that I spilt my coffee all over my legs.

Alas! I was wrong for once. It was not from my *fiancée* at all, but from Miss Brand, and it ran thus:

'Belvidere.

'Sir,

'Instantly return Miss Mosetta's diamond ring by bearer, or I shall place the matter in the hands of the police without delay. The ring you had the impudence to give Miss Mosetta, my butler, who brings this, will hand you. I need scarcely say that after your disgraceful conduct of yesterday you will not be allowed to go out riding again with Miss Mosetta; indeed, my butler has orders, if you ever dare show your face near my house, to give you in charge immediately.

'Sopronia Brand.

'P.S.—I will make arrangements during the day for the horse I purchased from you on Miss Mosetta's account to be removed to other stables.'

And that, gents, was the last I heard of Miss Mosetta.

'The young woman was mad, it is to be presoomed,' remarked Farmer Peewit.

'Mad as a hatter, though of course I was not aware of it at the time,' replied the virtuous Mr. Hicks. 'And,' he added, 'Miss Brand was her keeper. I didn't know that either until afterwards.'

NOTE BY AUTHOR.

The injured Mr. Hicks had hardly conclude
experience with Miss Mosetta, when Bob Magnum
had left the room for a moment, came back in a
of great excitement.

'Gentlemen,' he exclaimed, 'I've some news fo
The frost's breaking up at last. There's a nice
falling, and one of the pipes 's just burst.'

Sure enough next morning when I woke it was
ing hard. Later on I received a telegram fro
hunting friends saying they would be back in tim
dinner. I knew then that I had paid my last vis
the Horse-shoe Club.

THE END

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